

**TAFESILAFA'I: TOWARDS A SAMOAN EPISTEMOLOGY
IN THE DIASPORA**

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the Faculty of the
Claremont School of Theology**

**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy**

**by
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This Dissertation, written by

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ABSTRACT

TAFESILAFI: TOWARDS A SAMOAN EPISTEMOLOGY IN THE DIASPORA

by

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Tafesilafi is an ongoing community conversation initiated by the Samoan diasporic neighborhoods, in response to social and economic challenges in the United States. It has now become a festival. Using the grounded theory research methodology, in conjunction with narrative inquiry, an overarching theory was extracted from the participatory action data: Samoans are unique because of their *fa'a-Samoa* worldview. Because of the uniqueness of the *fa'a-Samoa*, in that it is grounded in its own unique cosmogony, social infrastructures, land, culture, and language, Samoans come to know differently, in addition, the same facts and data can be perceived differently in different Samoan communities.

In explaining the *fa'a-Samoa* as a framework that relates everything for Samoans, the resulting theories of how Samoans come to know are invariably placed in dialogue with process theories of perception. The resulting epistemological infrastructure is nurtured to promote a dialogue between the communality and solidarity of the Samoan community on the one hand, and the prevalent solitary and fragmented paradigm of life in the diaspora on the other.

The resulting mechanism -- Tafesilafi -- is a faith-and-community-based organization that functions as an organic clearinghouse for things Samoan, and a think tank that create safe spaces where inquiries about the Samoan people, language and culture are addressed. Tafesilafi is also a place where contributions by the Samoan community are made to the larger community.

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And to you, O God, whose steadfast love endures forever.

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PREFACE

I wanted this work to be about finding solutions to problems plaguing the Samoan community in the United States. More important, and in keeping with the Samoan proverb, “*o le fofo mo le alamea*,” I wanted to extract those solutions from within the boundaries of the Samoan community itself, and solutions that resonate with the basic core of what it means to be Samoan.¹ In this process of finding solutions to problems, I have isolated what it means to be a Samoan and that is: All that constitutes the *fa'a-Samoa* or Samoan worldview. In an attempt to find out what constitutes the *fa'a-Samoa*, I rediscovered the importance of the *va* or relationships between entities in the Samoan worldview. In extricating what the *va* means in specific contexts and in different social settings, confronting epistemological issues was inescapable. Prior beginning to know all that constitutes the *fa'a-Samoa*, one has to have knowledge of how one comes to know. It is the pursuit of this fundamental question, how persons come to know, that has informed the research, the data collection and the theory generation. It is my prayer that in the pursuit of the epistemological question, some inroads into all that constitutes the *fa'a-Samoa* will be made, and the solutions to problems plaguing the Samoan community in the United States are discovered.

While in seminary I was privileged to study the work of Alfred North Whitehead, a philosopher truly interested in epistemological issues; I felt that Whitehead's ideas of perception from a process-thought framework resonated well with the Samoan idea of the

¹ “*o le fofo ole alamea*” When someone is stung by a poisonous sea urchin (*alamea*), the cure (*fofo*) can be found usually with the sea urchin itself. The proverb *fight fire with fire* has close meaning to the Samoan proverb quoted here; from the problems themselves, may develop a solution.

va. As I put Whitehead's ideas of perception in dialogue with the indigenous Samoan idea of the *va*, theories emerged that were supported by the grounded research data, about how Samoans come to know. The data collection has allowed me to work very intimately with the Samoan community in the United States as well as in Samoa, paying close attention to recurring themes and how the concept of the *va* is mediated in the communities; as a result, I have learned to appreciate how Samoans make sense of the world and how the idea of a meaningful life is often disrupted during the immigration process.² From the research, we have affirmed that there are still close connections between the diasporic communities and the Samoan community in the Islands, and that there are quite a number of transnational activities between the two communities even throughout second and third generation Samoans. Transnational meaning that the diasporic communities still keep meaningful ties with the sending country.³ Churches continue to have ties to the sending countries, remittances continue to flow to the sending country and the politics are also intertwined between the United States and Samoa.⁴ It is obvious that second generation Samoans in the diaspora experience all three types of transnational participatory patterns as outlined by Peggy Levitt, (1) in diasporic communities with high levels of institutional completeness, meaning communities that

² The major waves of Samoan immigrations were in 1900's and 1950's. While many Samoans have progressed and move on, many have not and still many are battling initial progress issues, living transitory lives and not transitioning into the wider community.

³ Philip Kasinitz, et al, "Transnationalism and the Children of Immigrants in New York," in The Changing Face of Home: The Transnational Lives of the Second Generation, ed. Peggy Levitt and Mary C. Waters (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2002), 96-122.

⁴ Churches in the United States still have denominational ties with Churches in Samoa. This is true of the major denominations such as the Congregational Churches, United Methodist and Roman Catholic. More than eighty percent of the GNP of Samoa is attributed to remittances from off Island. American Samoa receives over \$80million annually in direct assistance from the United States Government and has a non-voting member of parliament in the United States Congress. Samoans born in American Samoa are considered United States National and travel freely to the United States without requiring a visa.

satisfy most of their needs within the community itself, participants experience dual belonging; (2) depending on participants stage in life, their transnational participation ranges from constant, to periodic, to intensive depending on their life's journey; (3) socio-economic characteristics dictates the level of transnational activism.⁵ In addition, the level of transnational activity in diasporic Samoan community cannot be maintained in isolation. Rather, it exists and increases in wider webs of social relations in the community. Since Samoans come from distinctive communities in Samoa, that are somewhat modified in the United States, it is important to see how the lure of maintaining the *fa'a-Samoa* has brought Samoans together, initially, in church communities in the United States and how these churches have consequently supported and controlled their members. Similar arrangements were documented by Helene Slessarev-Jamir in her work with poor and disadvantaged Asian immigrants.⁶ It is also important to see how the churches fit into American society that surrounds them and the contribution that the Samoan churches make to the larger dominant community.

Samoans also experience what Min Zhou and Carl L. Bankston III call selective Americanization.⁷ Some have cleaved to religious communities that were created, and adapted to the new environment, by their parents in response to less than friendly conditions in the new land; they have taken on the values, including indigenous Samoan values, of the Samoan communities in the diaspora. This eventually calls for successful

⁵ Peggy Levitt and Mary C. Waters, ed., The Changing Face of Home: The Transnational Lives of the Second Generation, (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2002), 123-144.

⁶ Helene Slessarev-Jamir. A Place of Refuge and Sustenance: How Faith Institutions Strengthen the Families of Poor Asian Immigrants (Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2003)

⁷ Min Zhou and Carl L. Bankston III, Growing Up American: How Vietnamese Children Adapt to Life in the United States. (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1998), 224-227.

adaptation and encourages mobility goals. Others have chosen to assimilate into the immediate local social environment, which is often in impoverished segments of American society. The first route is rather difficult as the youth find that they do not have as much “American freedom” as their school peers, and that they would be obliged to respect their elders, teachers and other authority figures. The second route is relatively easier, but would ostracize the youth from the indigenous community, assimilating them into social environments where they find themselves in, which usually resemble those who are trapped in inner cities and have the least opportunity for upward mobility. Additionally, according to our research, selective Americanization demands the creation of many more intimate social structures for preserving the *va* on the one hand, as well as requiring the Samoan community to engage existing infrastructures for the sake of preserving the *fa'a-Samoa* on the other.

From the research, it was clear that the immigration process disrupted what it means to be the kind of community that Samoans were accustomed to in the islands. Coming to the United States has subjected Samoans to many newer, different and larger forms of community that have impinged on their usual ways of how community is realized and how the *va* is properly respected. It also became clear that the church communities of the first generation immigrants seemed ill equipped to contain the various components of the ever expanding notion of the *fa'a-Samoa* in the United States.⁸ This

⁸ Leaders of the religious communities in the United State when asked to name their concerns about the *fa'a-Samoa* responded along three polarities (1) nostalgic about the past – even second generation leaders reflect nostalgically about the “good old days” when the elders were very much involved in how things got done in the community, (2) afraid for their children losing the culture – leaders recognize the contribution that culture makes in maintaining some “grounded” identity, and the possibility that their children and grandchildren can not participate effectively in its blessings, (3) concern about not making it in the United States – all leaders are aware of why they left Samoa to travel to the United States. Most

has necessitated forming new ways of coming together, and relating to others both within the community, as well as in relation to those outside the community. Tafesilafa'i is intended to be that newer place where positive cultural experiences are incorporated into the specific life experiences of the Samoan youth in the United States. One of the means of achieving this goal is to role-model positive cultural experiences, appropriate *fā'a-Samoa* and *va* promoting behaviors, inserting the lessons in between festive activities. Ideas such as *faaaloalo*, respect, excellence, beauty, dexterity, finesse and such values as servant leadership, hard work, fun loving, conflict resolution in non-violent ways, and breaking bread are interspersed throughout the life of the community culminating in the Tafesilafa'i Festival. Tafesilafa'i operates on the belief that if enough positive experiences could be put into the youth's memory banks, and enough good memories are extracted from their parents, elders and chiefs, then the youth would always have some positive experience to draw from, perhaps unconsciously, and, in later life, those experiences might help provide the growing Samoan community with a foundation for living better. As a healthy community engaged in life giving activities, Samoans will naturally address their problems in a way that provides a template for the next generation of Samoans to build upon.

think the current church structures, set up by their elders, are now impeding those reasons for being here, and many are willing to listen for alternatives.

CHAPTER 1

Background and Introduction

This chapter begins with the researcher's personal journey, which creates a natural beginning for any conversation. The story begins to ground this inquiry in a community of one as well as serve as an open invitation to other conversational partners. The next portion of the chapter serves as a summary of other chapters to follow, further providing background data to the writing. As Tafesilafa'i is an ongoing conversation of the Samoan diasporic community in response to social and economic challenges in the United States, the problems and challenges are embedded in the narrative, and can be accessed fully when in conversation and in community. Finally, the last portion is a summary of this chapter with some thoughts about how conversations are perceived in light of literary insights.

Personal Journey: If there is one scripture which captures the essence of what God has done and is continually doing in my spiritual journey, it is Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, chapter nine. In it Paul speaks of how he has tried to become all things to all people so he could save some, and he does it all for the sake of the gospel so he may share in its blessings. In retrospect, throughout my journey, as evidenced in the spiritual benchmarks along my pilgrimage, God became all things, so that God might save and preserve me for the work of the Church someday.

The Reverend David Bowen was a missionary from England who became the principal at Malua Theological College from 1966-1967; the same time my father was teaching at the seminary. Pouena, as Mr. Bowen was affectionately called, brought to the theological conversations a compassionately liberal approach to ministry. It was

compassionate when compared to the highly regimented, quasi-legalistic and dogmatic theology of the day and liberal when compared to the theologies of Protestant missionaries that brought Christianity to our shores in 1830. Bowen became a formative figure at the seminary and throughout the islands advocating a more fluid, people centered, relational and process approach to doing theology. Bowen made such an impression on my father that my father named his first son after him. That was how I got my name Misipouena, a missionary name Bowen. The name is not as common as Sarah, Mike, Tom or Phyllis, but the story of how I got my name has proven to be a useful conversation piece among new acquaintances, and retelling the story has kept me in theological circles throughout the years.

In 1969 while teaching at Malua Theological College, my father was called to pastor a church in the village of Aua, American Samoa. It had a population of about six hundred persons and was home to five different denominations, namely Congregational, Roman Catholic, Latter Day Saints, Full Gospel, and Assembly of God. It was in this village that I grew up until I left for college in Honolulu in 1982. I started elementary school at an all boy's Roman Catholic school in nearby Atu'u village, and, from what I recall of my early childhood years, there was a sense that there was always something wrong. I remember a strong, distinct, and persistent push towards certain expectations. I remember those expectations as being other than something that revolved around my sense of self; in other words, these were external expectations. It seemed that there was an ideal that all kids were expected to strive for, and this created constructive tension in my life. There was always a notion that someone was watching. Growing up, I came to accept that as normative. Constructive tension was mostly coming from the watchful

Catholic brothers who ran the school. A day didn't go by without the brothers reminding us of something that we had failed to do or had intentionally left out. Reflecting upon that experience now, there may not have been a single individual in trouble all the time, but it seemed that each of the kids took turns getting into trouble. There were thirty of us in a class, and the teachers almost always seemed to be irritated. As kids, I remember doing things so we wouldn't get spanked; much unlike kids today who are encouraged to do things so that they can get rewards. It was a completely different paradigm in which I grew up.

Tension was also coming from my folks who were full-time parental figures. Pastors, for cultural reasons, play very formative roles in the Samoan community, and their children are equally held to commensurately formative standards. When the Catholic brothers disciplined us at school, our parents would find out and give us another spanking. Pressure also was coming from the congregation in which my parents served and from the village in which we lived. Each of these different communities, in their own "watchful" way, guided and molded my spiritual formation. The next eight years of my life were spent answering to my parents, the Catholic brothers, the village, and the church. Between Catholic schools, the pastor's school, the church calendar and the village schedule, there was never a time when we would do nothing. The kids were kept alert in this way and the community played a major role in how I moved through my pilgrimage.

The Catholic brothers were strict disciplinarians. We were taught the catechism, which did not seem like a foreign religion at the time. At school, we were taught values consistent with those espoused by our parents at home, in the village and at

church. At home my father was always reading our school progress report cards and notices and inquiring about things at school and commenting on it incessantly, clearly expressing his expectations of not just doing well, but excelling in school. Under the close supervision and watchful eyes of our parents, we were taught to respect and take instructions from our teachers, our elders, and the adults in our lives. I remember having to be mindful of a lot of rules, and I can always remember kids getting into trouble and being reprimanded by the adults. We had all sorts of rules and regulations. We had a no-television-during-the-week rule; we had a swim once-a-week rule. When entering the house we were to leave our shoes outside. We could not eat while standing or walking around. The adults eat first, the smaller kids next, and the grown kids last. In the village and the church we were encouraged to speak using proper, respectful words. When you are serving, you had to wear your *lavalava* or wrap around. You could not wear shorts on church property. The village had a curfew, at 6pm, for prayers. During these quiet times, I remember being trained, and taught how to pray, and read the Bible in Samoan. I preached my first sermon in front of our congregation in Aua at the age of twelve. My text was Matthew 2:12, and I remember preaching about the need for people to change from the old to the new, from one direction to another. Around that time, I would say my faith could be characterized as embryonic in that I had not yet made a valuable connection between myself and God. God to me at that time was a non-being, with no specific influence on my life. I do remember saying my prayers at night, but it was out of obedience and not because I was conscious of the divine.

At the age of thirteen, I was sent to a neighboring island for high school, and, it being my first time away from home, I remember the tearful farewells, the sleepless

nights, the empty feeling in my heart, which left me missing my quasi-monastic existence at home. This was my first time away from home, and I was homesick the entire first year. My grieving brought me closer to God as I begged God to quicken the days and shortened the nights, till I got to go home to my parents and family. While in High School, I got involved with the local chapter of Youth for Christ, spending hours in bible studies and early morning prayer meetings. It was this move outside my family which clearly named the distinction God for me. While I was at home, God just was. On my home island, God was such an integral part of my life at school, at home, and at church that I took God for granted. God was everywhere in my life and nowhere in particular. The influence of God was not fully developed yet, and God, as other than what is so, did not resonate with me while at home. Now that I was away from the watchful eyes of my parents, and away from my natural habitat, pushed into new surroundings, introduced to unfamiliar territory, God became a reality, a filler of the void, and one who answers prayers. God for me now took on a different being and otherness in my life. I missed my family so much during those first twelve months that God became my comforter, giving me hope, sustaining me until I got to go home again. Later on, I saw this as a recurring theme in the Samoan diasporic experience as their relationship to the divine vacillated from invisible to all encompassing, between times of communal need and plenty. Rather than praying to God just to pacify my parents, I prayed because I longed for my family and needed hope to fill my longing for home. God, for the first time, took on a new dimension in my spiritual walk and became a real force for me. When exams came around, I begged God to give me intelligence; when pushed around by other kids, I would ask God for strength to persevere. As I deepened my relationship with God, I began to

find new and creative ways of presenting my problems, big and small, to God. In essence, God became an order-taker, catering to my whims and serving at the pleasure of my most immediate concerns.

While I was away from home, responsibility was named for me in a different way. The school was a co-ed boarding school, and I quickly learned to make my bed, clean the dormitory, cut grass with a machete, cook food in the traditional cooking pit, climb a coconut tree, iron and mend clothes, play cricket, and manage my own money. During the mid-term breaks, I would travel back to my home island, and I noticed that my parents were less strict with the children. We were not as closely watched. After High School, I went back home, and my parents enrolled me in the community college where I earned an Associate of Arts degree.

While attending college and staying with my parents, I remember being very active in the church. I taught Sunday school, helped out with youth bible studies, and taught Samoan language school. Samoan language school was an after-school program run by my father which taught math, bible, reading, and writing in the Samoan language. Everyone was invited, and the girls were given additional lessons in sewing, weaving, and crocheting. These Samoan language based classes were held in the afternoon, and I remember helping my parent with these classes. Life was much less regimented, however, during these times, and I enjoyed the time spent at home. I would lead our evening prayers, participate in different services both at the local level and at the association level. It was around this time when our church hosted the UCC Southern California Conference's fact finding trip which came down to American Samoa in 1981. Church was fun and playful, and God was the God of fun times.

In 1982 I got a scholarship for further studies at the University of Hawaii. I moved to Honolulu for school and immediately felt a certain spiritual distance from home. The guardrails that kept me on the straight path were now gone. I no longer had the guidance and watchful eyes of my parents, and dormitory life was not as regimented as the boarding schools or life in the family and village. The first big change was my church attendance. Samoan churches were quite far from campus, and I did not have personal transportation. This, and the rigorous engineering curriculum at school, were often quoted reasons for my not attending Church on a regular basis or becoming a member of the body of Christ. While in Honolulu, I began to carve out a person that was going to be “me” for the next three years.

At the end of my first year in Honolulu, and with the help of other Samoan students attending the University, I got a part time job on campus and bought my first car – a 1970 Chevrolet comet. My first two years away from home were fun and exploratory times for me, and, of course, my grades started to deteriorate, much to my parent’s chagrin. My prayers, often triggered by a failed exam, a social crisis, or an unpleasant event in my life, seemed to go unanswered, and it discouraged me further from seeking the God I knew growing up. During my time in Hawaii, I got to go home to my parents only once. This is too much time away from home for teenagers who are going through so many profound changes in their lives. On the one hand I welcomed the college experiment and all its what’snextness, but on the other hand I knew I could never go back to the home I once knew. Reflecting back on these events, the first time I left home I missed my parents, and God became my comforter, order taker, and God delivered. When I left for Hawaii I did not miss my parents as much; in fact I was glad to be at a

different place away from home, and God was again relegated to just an order-taker, only this time God was silent. Towards the end of my three and half years in Hawaii and with minimal emotional scars, I graduated from the University of Hawaii with a Civil Engineering degree.

Growing in Faith: In the spring of 1984, while still attending school in Hawaii, my parents were called to a congregation in Long Beach, California and so the family moved. When I graduated from Hawaii in 1985 I went home, only this time home was in California where my parents were. For the first time in a long time, our entire family was now re-united in Long Beach living in a two bedroom one bath apartment in downtown Long Beach. It was during this new encounter with my parents, in a foreign land, when my faith started to grow in leaps and bounds. After college, I took a job as an administrator for a billing service not too far from home and began to help our family financially.

One of the things that began to change was my relationship with my parents, especially my father and the ministry. The church that called them had just gone through a major membership drain, which left behind only four families. Their monthly gift to the pastor, often used as a gauge of spirituality, averaged less than what a two bedroom apartment rented for at the time. The church had one asset, a building which had a mortgage of about \$30,000 with a monthly payment of \$413 per month. Needless to say, the church would not have survived if it were not for the work of the committed few. A church in the United States is quite different from a church in Samoa. While pastors occupy the top 1% of wage earners in a typical village in Samoa, this was not the case in the United States. Seeing my father toil to make ends meet, support his family, and keep

the church members spiritually fed at the same time and having my mother take a job as a seamstress at a garment factory left such an impression on my mind, and transformed my idea of doing ministry in this new environment. Whereas before I saw the ministry revolving around one person, the pastor, now I began to view ministry as everyone's responsibility. All of a sudden my relationship with my parents was no longer strained, we each had a job to do, and we were happy to do it. These early years brought our family together as a team. I got a job, my older sister got a job, my younger brother got a job, while my other two sisters went to school, one in college and another in elementary school. I worked and helped out with the church, teaching Sunday school, leading the youth, and singing in the choir. In 1986 I was appointed to serve on the United Church of Christ Youth Roundtable, my very first experience with an Anglo-American church institution.

I promised myself earlier that I would go back to school for a graduate degree, so in 1987, I started attending California State University Fullerton working towards an MBA. Time went by fast. The family purchased a house in 1988, and we moved out of our two bedroom apartment to what seemed like a huge three bedroom, one bath house. My eldest sister got married in 1989, I got married in 1991, and my younger sister got married later on in the same year. Everyone that was employable had a job. The church was growing under my father's leadership with twenty-six families and the mortgage was retired in 1987. I graduated with an MBA in 1993. It was the best of times.

A Life Cycle Event: It seemed that after the mortgage was paid off, there was restlessness within the church families that can only be characterized as the clashing of Judeo-Christian missionary values with the cultural-based need to survive in a foreign

land. On the one hand there was a group that wanted to expand the ministry of the Church to serve others, which entailed looking for a bigger space. On the other hand, there was a group that was content with just remaining where they were, now that the mortgage was paid off, and just be satisfied with what God has given them. My father was a proponent of the first group, wanting to expand the church and have it be a beacon of hope for Samoans in Southern California. As my father looked for ways to grow the ministry of the Church both in membership and in faith, his health began to deteriorate. Some of the families became discouraged with his leadership and left the church. Others never participated fully in the theological conversations that he brought to the church. In 1994 my father lost his battle with emphysema and died at the age of 70. At the time of his death, I was a lay preacher for the church, working full time at a large commercial bank, and in my first semester at the Claremont School of Theology. We were unprepared for my father's death; it shocked my mother, our family as well as the congregation. I'm not sure why I thought my father was going to live forever. It was the best of times, true, but it was also the worst of times.

The passing of my father was a turning point in my life. Called to succeed my father, the church now looked to me for direction and guidance. Almost overnight, what seemed important to me changed. I had been groomed for a responsible position in the financial world and now was being called to lead a faith community. I reluctantly accepted the call. For me, to spend one's adult life training for one thing and then called to be something else in a different field was not my idea of an examined and intentional life. I continued to hold down my full time job while going to seminary and leading the

church, each day grappling with what to do at this juncture in my life. My wife and I did a lot of soul searching trying to figure out what the next steps would be.

In the summer of 1997 a pastor friend called asking to borrow my truck to pick up some bakery equipment. I agreed and we drove from Long Beach to Utaw, Alabama. The trip took 32 hours stopping only for refueling. In Alabama, I met Bishop Luke Edwards who pastors the Greater Christ Temple Church in Meridian, Mississippi. The trip and the meeting with Bishop Edwards proved to be another turning point in my life. Bishop Edwards introduced me to a way of doing ministry that was completely foreign to me. Needless to say, I got excited about the ministry. When I arrived home around midnight, I woke up my wife and told her that I had decided to quit my full time job and to devote my time to the ministry of the Church. We prayed that night over the decision I was making and six months later I started working full time for the church.

What did I see in Alabama? I saw a faith community that lived out what it means to be Christian on a daily basis and not just on Sundays. It was an authentic community that is action based, and a church that emphasized orthopraxis over orthodoxy. I experienced a community engaging society on a constant basis, commenting incessantly on injustices, participating in the lives of the communities which it serves, co-creating with God and members of the community, not unlike the ministry of Jesus Christ. It was a model of doing church that created space where personal skills, acquired over years of training, can be used to help others in the community. Doing church was more than just a vocation, it was a way of life that allowed the work of the church to intersect with the work of the world. This was a church that owned and operated several enterprises in the

community, with each one set up to proclaim God's good news to the community. This church studied the bible and then lived the bible in their day-to-day lives.

A New Vision: Having seen a vision of what our church could be, I was empowered to pursue that vision. Armed with this new idea about the possibilities of a church living out the mandates of a loving and inclusive God, influencing the lives of many, and impacting the community in which it finds itself in, I felt called to this line of work. This was a church worth losing one's life in. One of the most revolutionary ways of relating to resources that I have adopted is the revised notion of tithing. In the past I used to think of tithing as that which is God's – 10%; this idea limited God to just that first ten percent of what one makes; now I realized that it's all God's, and we are just privileged to use the first 90% of God's resources. This distinction itself allowed a different way of looking at the world. The God that once existed out in the heavens for me has now taken on a much closer, personal, and inclusive presence. A God that was very limited in its power and influence has now become an efficient God, utilizing all that was, is and yet to be. The efficient God, and by efficient I mean a God that is all effective and without any unintended consequences, became a privileged distinction for me as I began to examine my life closely and myself becoming open to the unlimited possibilities of God and as such the possibilities of what a church can do in the world. Prior this place in time, I had seen God only from a particular perspective, which was honed over the years through my upbringing and influenced by cultural biases; frankly, it was a less than life-giving image. Then we came to this image of God, a God that is still speaking, a God that is of endless possibilities, with each possibility representing a greater experience of the previous.

The notion of an efficient God is similar to the development of the distinction *tama* or father in the Samoan community. If God is like a *tama* or father to me, and God created the world and all that is in it, then I am God's son and heir to all that God created. The fact that one is kin to the creator endows one with confidence, self esteem, and freedom on the one hand, and yet burdens one with reverence and responsibility on the other. While the previous image of God does not allow participation in God-like beingness, the *tama* or father image creates a relationship between the creator and creature. Knowledge of this relationship with the divine humbled me deeply, having realized that so much depends on humanity in all its pluriformity and humanness. Like the Psalmist who wrote "what are human beings that the God of the Universe is mindful of them" and who is humanity that God even cares?¹ Knowing that I am part of God's divine scheme all along gives me peace, grounding, joy, and fulfillment. When I tendered my resignation from work in the summer of 1997, it felt like I was going home. It was the beginning of a new journey.

This dissertation therefore is an extension of this long arduous personal journey that took a turn in 1997 when it became clear that the work that I was about to embark on was worth pursuing, that the work was worth losing one's life in. The work entrusted to me was nothing less than the transformation of a portion of the world, through the transformation of a people in which I am an active part. This work has led me to inquire about the different ways of knowing and furthermore the different ways of knowing in the Samoan community.

¹ Psalm 8:4 "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?" Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Holy Bible.

Chapter 2 describes in detail the methodology used in describing Samoan epistemology and the impact that challenges encountered have on theory creation. In describing the methodology, this chapter gives its historical background, connects this methodology to the work in the community, lifts out particular applications in the field, notes variations, and offers suggestions for why it is so.

Chapter 3 covers the social, religious, and political infrastructures in the Samoan community in diaspora. This chapter also describes epistemological infrastructures in the Samoan community, underscoring the complexity of the task to educate, transform and influence a people, and points to the arduous discipline of understanding, let alone transforming, a community.

In Chapter 4, Whiteheadian thought and process theology are placed in dialogue with first hand experiences, field notes, and descriptive reflections about how Samoans come to know. It is an attempt to answer the question – How do persons learn? The second part of the chapter attempts to answer the question – How do Samoans learn and what is the relationship between process and Samoan epistemology? The final part of this chapter is a discussion of goals and aspirations and how we can utilize a Samoan epistemology to implement some of those goals in the world.

Chapter 5 takes the knowledge of how Samoans come to know, and juxtaposes it onto the Samoan concept of the *va*, which governs all interaction for community building and organizing. This chapter discusses the onerous task of putting these themes together in some quasi-coherent order so a contribution can be made to the world of Practical Theology.

Chapter 6 covers some of the insights gained from the research, as well as possible alternatives and implications for certain constructs – theological, social and economical. The Tafesilafa’i curriculum, in the last portion of this chapter, is an attempt to capture in writing how a typical conversation is initiated, guided, and sustained in authentic ways in the Samoan community.

Finally, the last chapter is a short summary of major insights gleaned from the research data and possible next steps towards explicating Samoan epistemology in the Samoan community in the western United States.

Summary: This chapter started with grounding the work in my own personal journey, as an authentic approach to entering into conversation. This approach also captures the “unique” part of the thesis: Samoans are unique because of their *fa’a-Samoa* worldview, in that each of our stories is a unique part of the mosaic that constitutes a distinct community. Why is Samoan epistemology important? Because paying attention to Samoan epistemology will gift the learner with a basic understanding of Samoan culture which forms a grounded basis upon which appropriate actions and reflections are taken to overcome social and economic challenges. The landscape of the rest of the work is laid out so the readers will have a bird’s eye view of things to come; a cathartic case is made for continuing the work as it is worth one’s life.

Because much of the data and items discussed in this dissertation belong to an oral culture, the data is not always found in written form and in some cases only exist authentically in conversations. Therefore, this inquiry has led the researcher to explore settings where conversations take place and these incidences are documented in the

footnotes. As Tafesilafa'i is an ongoing conversation by the Samoan diasporic community, in response to social and economic challenges in the United States, the conversations and conversation partners occupy the place of expert sources of the oral culture in much the same way literary sources serve in a less-than-oral-culture. In this respect conversations in this work are given equal status to the literary sources and are thus included in the bibliography.

In the next chapter, the grounded theory methodology and narrative inquiry methods used in describing Samoan epistemology is discussed and connected to the work that I have done in the community which extracted the thesis of this dissertation: Samoans are different because of their *fa'a-Samoa* worldview and because of the uniqueness of the *fa'a-Samoa*. Samoans come to know differently.

CHAPTER 2

Methodology: Grounded Theory and Narrative Inquiry

The doing may be energetic and the undergoing may be acute and intense. But unless they are related to each other to form a whole in perception, the thing done is not fully esthetic... If the artist does not perfect a new vision in his process of doing, he acts mechanically and repeats some old model fixed like a blueprint in his mind.

- John Dewey, Art as Experience

This chapter describes in detail the methodology used in describing Samoan epistemology, noting any variations in the field, any challenges encountered, and the impact these challenges have had on theory creation. In describing the methodology, this chapter gives its historical background, connecting it to the field and the work of discerning the various ways of knowing, lifting out particular applications in the field, notes any variations, and offers suggestions for these variations.

Grounded Theory

Historical Background: Anselm Strauss and Barney Glaser are credited with developing the methodology used in this inquiry, which is commonly known as grounded theory.¹ Since their collaboration, both Strauss and Glaser have taken different approaches to grounded theory, and others have made contributions to the different strands and emphases that have emerged from the initial collaboration.² Grounded theory remains an

¹ Barney Glaser, Theoretical Sensitivity: Advances in the Methodology of Grounded Theory (Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press, 1978). See also, Barney Glaser, Basics of Grounded Theory Analysis: Emergence Versus Forcing (Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press, 1992); Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, The Discovering of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research. (Chicago: Aldine Publishing, 1967); Anselm Strauss, Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

² Setsuo Mizuno, "On Some Characteristics of Contemporary Japanese Society," in Grounded Theory in Practice, ed. Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997).

innovative method of qualitative analysis used in such disciplines as sociology,³ nursing,⁴ education,⁵ and organizational studies.⁶

Anselm Strauss received his advanced degree from the University of Chicago, where there was an entrenched tradition of doing what is now called qualitative research. By “qualitative research” we mean research that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification. It is research that involves an in depth understanding of human behavior and the principles that govern human behavior. Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research relies on reasons behind various aspects of behavior. It investigates the *why* and *how* of decision making, as compared to the *what*, *where*, and *when* of quantitative research. This approach in many ways resonates with the general idea of the *va* in the Samoan community which reduces relationships to genuine motivation and reasons for acting, as well as the reflecting on the consequences of our actions more thoroughly and with rigor. Since quantity is deemphasized, the data necessary for qualitative analysis are extracted from smaller but more focused samples, rather than from large and random samples. This data is categorized and coded into

251-66. See also T. Goto, H. Ohode, and S. Mizuno, trans., *Deetataiwagata riron no hakken* (Tokyo: Shinyousha, 1996).

³ Joan H. Fujimura, “The Molecular Biological Bandwagon in Cancer Research: Where Social Worlds Meet. Social Problems,” *Sociology of Science and Technology* 35(3)(1988): 261-83. See also Adele E. Clarke, “A Social World’s Research Adventure: The Case of Reproductive Science,” in *Theories of Science in Society*, eds. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1990), 15-35.

⁴ Susan Leigh Star and Geoffrey C. Bowker (1997), “Of Lungs and Lungers: The Classified Story of Tuberculosis,” *Mind, Culture, and Activity* 4(1) (1997):3-23. See also Celia J. Orona, “Temporality and Identity Loss Due to Alzheimer’s Disease,” *Social Science and Medicine* 10(1990) 1247-56

⁵ Isabelle Baszanger, “Deciphering Chronic Pain,” *Sociology of Health & Illness* 14(1992): 181-215.

⁶ Krzysztof Konecki, “Time in the Recruiting Search Process by Headhunting Companies,” In the *Grounded Theory in Practice*, eds. Anselm Strause & Juliet Corbin, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997), 131-145

patterns which form the primary basis for organizing and reporting the results of the research.

Strauss was influenced by men such as Park, Thomas, Dewey, Meade, and Hughes⁷ who emphasized, with varying degrees of intensity, the importance of evaluating social questions empirically and refraining from the imposition of proscriptive moral judgments on social issues. Strauss also was trained in qualitative analysis and symbolic interactionism by Herbert Blumer who argued that any empirically-oriented representation of human society must respect the fact that human society consists of people engaging in action⁸. Symbolic interaction involves assigning meaning to the actions (interpretation) and conveying their meanings to others (definition). Thus meaning-making and the actions involved became important for Strauss. This idea finds a place in the *fa'a-Samoa* as each action is wrought with meaning and the meaning is constantly being negotiated in the *va*. The University of Chicago connection contributed the following precepts to the development of the grounded theory methodology, which formed the task list for the research: (1) the importance of getting out in the field to discover what is actually happening. The initial action research data was collected over a twelve month period during the summer of 2000. The data consisted of formal interviews with twelve families collecting answers to questions about the challenges they

⁷ Ralph H. Turner, ed., Robert E. Park on Social Control and Collective Behavior (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967). See also William I. Thomas, W.I. Thomas On Social Organization and Social Personality, Selected Papers, ed. Morris Janowitz. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); John Dewey, Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology (New York: Holt, 1922); George Herbert Meade, Mind, Self and Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist, ed. Charles Morris (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934); Everett C. Hughes, The Sociological Eye: Selected Papers (Chicago: Aldine-Atherton, 1971).

⁸ Herbert Blumer, Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1969).

are facing during their immigrant experience.⁹ As the interviews unfolded certain insights were gained about how community gathers and what constitutes challenges. From the initial interviews, the notion of life cycle events was gleaned as where much energy is found in the Samoan community. (2) The relevance of theory to the development of a discipline and as a basis for social action. Examining the community from a distance, it seemed there were few signs of life and no one seemed concerned about social advancement.¹⁰ When we tested that theory, it was discovered that life does exist in the community, energy is most pronounced during “life cycle events” or *faalavelave* in the community and Samoans have different metrics for social advancement.¹¹ Life cycle events mobilize the entire community, bringing it to life and providing the best educational moments for the community. Most social developments have been from a distance, lacking the social connection, and thus have not be as effective. (3) The complexity and variability of human action. Early interviews with families underscored the necessity of building an authentic relationship with families, over an extended period of time, to fully understand the complexities and variability of human action. A good example is the oral history experience mentioned elsewhere in

⁹ Interviews were conducted with twelve families from the Second Samoan Congregational UCC in Long Beach. All interviews were at their homes and in the evening as most work during the day. It was discovered because the “pastor” was coming to their home, it was seen as a performance review visit and so their responses were “sanitized” a bit.

¹⁰ These comments were echoed by Maurice Begay, a grant writer for Tafesilafa’i Inc 1999 & 2005, employed Jun. 2006-Oct. 2007, during a brainstorming session with the researcher. Samoans also are overly represented in such energy-intense industries as the National Football League and the United States Armed Forces.

¹¹ Chief Pa’u Faleatua believes the measure of advancement in the Samoan community is not how much one accumulates, but how much one gives away. According to Chief Pa’u, personal advancement in the Samoan culture is when one is surrounded by friends and family members attending life cycle events that pertain to a person. A person without a family, according to Chief Pa’u is impoverished indeed, regardless of material belongings.

this dissertation, called the Compton experience, where an affirmative response, when pressed, tested and authenticated, turned out to be a culturally polite negative response.

(4) The realization that persons are authentic actors who take an active role in responding to problematic situations. I remember giving a presentation to a church group of about fifty regarding the merits of Tafesilafa'i and how this can be a vehicle with which we can address some of the challenges that we are facing. When the questionnaires were passed out, a participant asked the question "What's in it for me?" I thought this line of questioning reflects an authentic actor who took an active role in responding to the many researchers that have done work in the community.¹² (5) The importance of assigning meaning to the actions of persons. In the *fa'a-Samoa*, maintaining the *va* is of paramount importance and each actor is respected at some basic and fundamental way. As such, each action is meaningful and must be of significance especially in relations to the ultimate *va*. (6) Understanding that meaning is constantly in flux and is defined and re-defined through interaction. This begins to point to the importance of community, gathering and the *nu'u* in the Samoan community. Only by coming together can meaningful relationship building and organizing be achieved. Because the meaning of each action is constantly changing, therefore efficient meaning making must be discerned and negotiated in community and not in isolation. (7) Sensitivity to the evolving and unfolding nature of events. This sensitivity is a gift that one is endowed with when engaged in community. Sensitivity is also nurtured and

¹² This incident is referred to as the Gardena Experience. Culturally it is appropriate to give a gift to the respondents; the corollary is that it is not appropriate to ask for something in return. So the exchange was authentic in the sense that these culturally "appropriate" ways of maintaining the *va* are slowly being re-examined authentically in community. I brought ceramic mugs that were later distributed to the group after the questionnaires were collected, but my direct response to her was, "With all due respect, there is nothing in this project for you."

refined in community which leads to understanding the nature and meaning of events as they unfold. This point is illustrated in the Samoan proverb: *E Fili le Tautai i Vasa*.¹³

(8) The interconnectedness of conditions (structure), actions (process) and consequences. These precepts form the background upon which this research project is based, in addition to the indigenous social constructs which inform the data collection, positive or otherwise and renders the findings uniquely Samoan.

Barney Glaser, on the other hand, is from Columbia University and was trained in quantitative sociology by Paul Lazarsfeld¹⁴. Lazarsfeld was from Vienna and received a doctoral degree in mathematics; his use of index formation and qualitative analysis was used by Glaser to form the basis for Glaser's contribution to the grounded theory methodology. Glaser came from a background with many good scientific methods, but not very good data. This was in contrast to the University of Chicago, which had wonderful data but not very good methods. In 1965 when Strauss came to the University of San Francisco, he looked for an interesting subject to examine, one that would capture the attention of the medical community. While visiting hospitals, Strauss discovered that dying was a highly problematic issue; he started field studies and formed an alliance with Glaser to develop a systematic and proper methodology for examining phenomena in the social sciences and a methodology that would be especially workable for those in

¹³ Rev. Oianata'i Matale shared this proverb during Tafesilafa'i 2006. It translates: a leader (*tautai*) is chosen (*fili*) at sea (*vasa*). According to Rev. Tuivanu, when fishermen go out to fish, their leaders are not pre-select but are determined by the sea and in relation to the elements. Whoever has verifiable knowledge of the unfolding nature of the elements and environment will emerge as the authentic and natural leader of the pack.

¹⁴ Paul F. Lazarsfeld, and Wagner Theielens, Jr., The Academic Mind: Social Scientists in a Time of Crisis. (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1958).

qualitative research. Thus, Awareness of Dying was written in 1965¹⁵, the first application of grounded theory. Two years later, Glaser and Strauss published The Discovery of Grounded Theory, a book on the methodology they developed while working on Awareness of Dying.

Glaser and Strauss suspected early on that the expectation of death by both the dying and their relatives were a key to understanding the interactions between these people. Glaser and Strauss' choice of hospitals and wards allowed them to compare various kinds of expectations. At a premature infant ward, for instance, mortality was high but the patients were not aware of their impending deaths, while at an oncology ward, dying was slow and there were pronounced differences in the awareness of dying. The typical situations were again different for emergency rooms and geriatric or pediatric departments.

Out of these field studies, Strauss and Glaser refined a theory of the influence of awareness on interactions with the dying. The studies differentiated between closed awareness, suspicion, mutual deception, and open awareness of death, with each level of awareness producing different interactions between people. Their field studies showed that the type of awareness had a significant impact on interactions with those who were dying. For instance, they discovered that if patients were not aware of their dying, the nursing was often limited to the absolutely necessary in order to prevent open awareness. In other cases, the open awareness of death would result in nursing having to include responses to patient anger, denial and resolve. These observations were recorded in the book The Discovery of Grounded Theory, the very beginning of grounded theory as a

¹⁵ Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, Awareness of Dying (New York: Aldine DeGruyter, 1969).

methodology. Grounded theory, as intended, now has evolved to become a research method most often associated with the social sciences. Glaser and Strauss's collaboration in the field led them to develop the *constant comparative* component of grounded theory; this was further developed as a systematic methodology and its name underscores the generation of theory from "grounded" data. When the principles of grounded theory are followed, a researcher using this approach will formulate a theory, either substantive, meaning for a specific setting, or formal, about the phenomena they are studying that can be evaluated. Throughout the course of this project, several substantive hypotheses about learning were extracted from the grounded data using the constant comparative method of analysis and its coding procedures, first comparing items in each category, then drawing up categories and finally comparing these categories. The most parsimonious of these will be placed in dialogue with the learning theories of Freire (1972, 1995), Postman (1985, 1992) and Gatto (2001, 2006). I use the term parsimony to mean that the theory has been subjected to the most rigorous economy and excessive frugality leaving no room for waste, speculation and excess.

Since their original publication in 1967, Glaser and Strauss have disagreed on "how to do" grounded theory. This split occurred immediately after Strauss published Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists in 1987 and Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory with Juliet Corbin in 1990. This was followed by a rebuke by Glaser published as Emergence vs. Forcing: Basics of Grounded Theory Analysis in 1992 in which Glaser highlighted the differences in what he argued was original grounded theory and why, according to Glaser, what Strauss had written was not grounded theory in its original intended form. This divergence in the

grounded theory methodology is the subject of much academic debate, which Glaser's 1998 book Doing Grounded Theory: Issues and Discussions.¹⁶ calls a "rhetorical wrestle" and is beyond the scope of this work.

What was the controversy between Glaser and Strauss? According to Udo Kelle, the controversy boils down to the question of whether the researcher uses a well defined "coding paradigm" and always looks systematically for "causal conditions," "phenomena/context, intervening conditions, action strategies" and "consequences" in the data, or whether theoretical codes are employed ad hoc, thereby drawing on a huge selection of "coding families." Glaser advocates open coding throughout the research, assigning a code to each datum ad hoc, which can eventually create an unmanageable data overload. Strauss submits that there are certain recurring themes around which many of these data can be gathered so as to make the data manageable. While Strauss sees "coding paradigm" as a practical way of grouping data, Glaser sees it as forcing the results.

Our Research Strategy: Both strategies have their pros and cons: novices who wish to get clear advice on how to structure data material may be satisfied with the use of the coding paradigm. Since the paradigm consists of theoretical terms which carry only limited empirical content, the risk is not very high that data are forced when applied. However, we must not forget that this paradigm is linked to a certain micro-sociological perspective. Many researchers may concur with that approach, especially since qualitative research always has had a relation to micro-sociological action theory, but

¹⁶ Barney Glaser, Doing Grounded Theory: Issues and Discussions. (Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press, 1998), 254.

others who want to employ macro-sociological and system theory perspectives may feel that the use of the coding paradigm would lead them astray.¹⁷ If one were to characterize the nature of the research done in my inquiry, it would gravitate towards the coding paradigm for several reasons. The first reason is because there seemed to be existing macro-sociological infrastructures in the community, which renders any attempt at change and transformation difficult. Samoans refer to this as the *fa'a-Samoa*. Evelyn Kallen defines the *fa'a-Samoa* as a “set of structured principles for ordering social life; a plethora of formidable constraints upon behavior; and an ideological underpinning for strong positive ethnocultural identification.”¹⁸ In other words, the inertia, persistence and resistance of an entrenched community, and the difficulty in moving them, can only be attributed to an overarching macro system in place that would, first, allow them to survive in the urban jungle and, second, would not allow them to change or advance forward. The second reason is that there are contextual nuances that pertain only to that particular Samoan community and only for that particular time and place. Illana Gershon suggested that instead of intuiting the *fa'a-Samoa* as a codified whole that can be universally applied, it is more accurate to see the *fa'a-Samoa* as a contextualized interpretation of the whole, and as such it can have local paradigmatic significance that varies from village to village and context to context.¹⁹

¹⁷ Udo Kelle, “‘Emergence’ vs. ‘Forcing’ of Empirical Data? A Crucial Problem of ‘Grounded Theory’ Reconsidered.” Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research [journal online], 6(2), Art. 27 (2005) paragraphs 49 & 50; available from <http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs-texte/2-05/05-2-27-e.htm> [accessed January 30, 2008].

¹⁸ Evelyn Kallen, The Western Samoan Kinship Bridge: A Study in Migration, Social Change and the New Ethnicity, Monographs and Theoretical Studies in Sociology and Anthropology in Honour of Nels Anderson; publication 18. (Leiden, the Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1982), 5.

In this inquiry into how a people come to know, grounded theory analysis is used as the primary analytical tool for identifying, processing, and collecting data and for generating theory.²⁰ There have been anthropological,²¹ historical,²² political,²³ and psychological²⁴ studies on Samoans, but little is documented and known about the *fa'a-Samoa* in foreign land from an insider's perspective. The only information that is available about Samoan educational structures is anecdotal and includes brief cursory descriptions from outside sources.²⁵ There is also no study in existence that informs us of Samoan theology, epistemology, pedagogy, and curriculum, or the role that Samoan culture, faith and political structures play in constructing and maintaining community in the diaspora. Thus, qualitative analysis, and grounded theory in particular, will work

¹⁹ Ilana Gershon, Making Differences Cultural: Samoan Migrant Families Encounter New Zealand and United States Government Bureaucracy, vol. 2, Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 2001(Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 2001).

²⁰ Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998)

²¹ Peter H. Buck [Te Rangi Hiroa], Vikings of the Sunrise (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co., 1938); see also Brad Shore, Sala'ilua: A Samoan Mystery (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

²² Lowell D. Holmes, Samoan Village. Study in Cultural Anthropology. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974). see also Robert Louis Stevenson, The War of 1893; available from <http://www.samoa.co.uk/books/1893war.html>. [accessed January 30, 2008].

²³ Robert Norton, "Titles Wealth and Factions: Electoral Politics in a Samoan Village," Oceania 55 (1984):100-17; see also Alessandro Duranti, "Politics and Grammar: Agency in Samoan Political Discourse," American Ethnologist 17(4)(1990):1-23.

²⁴ Jeannette Mageo, "Aga, Amio and Loto: Perspectives on the Structures of Self in Samoa." Oceania 59(1989):181-99. See also Elinor Ochs, "Talking to Children in Western Samoa," Language in Society 11(1982):77-104.

²⁵ Much of what is written about Samoans is filtered through outside lenses such as Peace Corps volunteer, Brad Shore, Sala'ilua; anthropologist, Margaret Mead, The Coming of Age in Samoa: A Study of Adolescence and Sex in Primitive Societies; academic rebuttals by persons such as Daniel Freeman (1984) Margaret Mead and Samoa: The Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth; or religious propagandas such as Oskar Stuebel, Agustin Kramer, and Bro. Herman, Tala o le Vavau: The Myths, Legends and Customs of Old Samoa; rev. and reprinted. Adapted from collection of Oskar Stuebel and Bro. Herman (Auckland, N.Z.: Pasefika Press, 1995). See also John Fraser, "Some Folk-Songs and Myths from Samoa." Journal of the Polynesian Society, (1890) Sydney.

well in our context, if only because their use generates new theories about Samoan epistemology; it grounds such theories in data, data referring to any experience that can be reproduced in any form and given an interpretation.²⁶

Narrative Inquiry

Historical Background: One of the notions that I encountered early on during the research was the dichotomy between academic scholarship and the world outside of scholarship. A closer examination of that bifurcation reveals that the divide is arbitrary at best and artificial at worst. I found myself living in that abyss when I was traveling to academia three days a week and living in the world outside scholarship the remainder of the week, yet I was thriving and bubbling with vitality. When I finally settled on a research question, the inquiry brought to the fore, again, this tension challenging the premise that epistemology and ontological issues are exclusively the concerns of the philosophy of science, meta-research, or other academic-based disciplines. The best that I am able to discern is that one applies the same kind of rigor and discipline to investigate how people understand reality and accept truth, (especially when one pastors an ethnic congregation concerned about loving and caring), as one does being a scholar concerned about getting the theory right. I certainly did not change my standards for knowing truth as I moved back and forth between scholarship and the world outside several times during the week.

It is because of being sensitive to this, albeit elusive, divide that I have incorporated narrative inquiry as an additional methodology used in the field to give form

²⁶ Strauss and Corbin, Basics of Qualitative Research, 11-12.

and contour to the interviews in ways that are not disruptive to the Samoan ethos. Narrative inquiry is the process of understanding experience as lived and as told in stories. In my research, narrative inquiry functions like a vessel to carry the water of knowledge between the theoretical and the practical world. Unlike more traditional methods, narrative inquiry successfully captures personal and human dimensions that cannot be quantified into dry facts and numerical data. There is a unique capacity of narrative inquiry to capture and illumine the depths of human experiences in all their complexities. In the field, it takes the form of reflective verbal exchanges between the investigator and the subject, continuously refining the grounding of the interchanges in the field. The investigator then writes a narrative of the experience in a journal.

Clandinin and Connelly note that "Humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and collectively, lead storied lives. Thus, the study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world."²⁷ Narrative inquiry, as a research methodology in this epistemological and scholarly discourse, functions to "get at" the content of human lives. It seeks to investigate human experiences as human beings live them in time, in space, in person, and in relationship. Narrative inquiry throughout this work invites all stakeholders to attend to these three-dimensional inquiry spaces—the temporal, the spatial and, most important, the personal-social space. In addition, there are stories behind the stories that are equally insightful and contribute to the research question. These stories are often shared when enough time has passed and it is deemed safe to share with others. Coupled with grounded theory, narrative inquiry further characterizes the nature of this project as an authentic lived experience including the

²⁷ Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly, Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research (San Francisco: Jossey Bass Publishers, 2000), 2.

uncertainties, the fears, the rejections, and the doubts likely to haunt qualitative researchers in moving from the identification of research problems, to data collection, to questioning, to theory-making; these are all necessary steps for composing an authentic, grounded, and persuasive research report. Then, to further authenticate the inquiry process, I bring my own stories to bear, modeling the reflexivity necessary to tend to this live project. This involvement of mine also calls for recasting any abstract concepts into narrative terms, to guide action in particular contexts with a certain group of people. Oral history, for example, is an effective tool that ethnographers often use to record the memories of different people about certain issues and experiences that they have lived through. My first attempt at using this was with a group of Samoan retirees, eight men in their 60's in Compton, California. I invited them to write an oral history of their experiences with immigration, income, and involvement with the community. The writing utensils were provided, refreshments were served, but the group was not motivated to share these insights, even though I was told previously that I could come that day and make a presentation. It was not until I began to share my own experiences about immigration that their stories were shared and compared to other immigration stories. Accomplishing this task called for me to recast abstract concepts into narrative terms using their native language and common narrative, explicating the role that past histories have on their current social status and how, when left unexamined, current social conditions may prove confusing, overwhelming and disempowering. The task proved daunting, and only two of the men decided to take up the project.²⁸

²⁸ This incident is referred to as the Compton Experience. It was days before Christmas on December 20, 2001. Their names were Fala, Kaisa, Pani, Petelo, Peala, Seiuli, Soe & Vai. Rev. Feleti Ngan Woo accompanied me to the site and we spent the entire afternoon trading stories about personal

When writing out the narratives, one is challenged with what Clandinin and Connelly called "signature," or writing style, which they warn can be either too weak, so as to efface the researcher's interpretive presence, or too strong, so as to eclipse the research participants and contexts. Either way, signature has a tendency to leave out what is considered important. In the context of this research a strong "signature" is inherently built into the narrative because many of the interviews and much of the communal data are in Samoan, while the narrative, after an initial period when Samoan was used extensively, was documented mostly in English. As the research moved forward, the need to translate and map concepts from their native Samoan context into existing western-centric paradigms and constructs proved overwhelming and, because classroom exercises, training, and much of the methodological literature were in English, the effort was not deemed an effective utilization of our limited resources; thus it was abandoned altogether. Therefore, concerns that the researcher's interpretive presence may be effaced due to a weak "signature" are not valid in this research. This will become more evident below.

On the other hand, we reduced the number of participants to just a few persons at a time, such that the conversations and discussions are focused more on participants. Towards the latter part of the research period, one of the insights that I gleaned from the data was: one-on-one proved most effective when it came to critically important things getting done. Whenever I wanted to get cooperation from a leader, I found spending time

humorous experiences in the United States. We did not get a single oral history and the two that said they would get us their stories never followed up with the project and we lost communication with them when their phones went out of service.

one-one-one with them most effective.²⁹ Under the rubric of what-is-considered-of-critical-importance, some would say concepts, ideas and specific knowledge systematically examined. In this work, of critical importance is what constitutes the *fa'a-Samoa* and I would advice caution lest we reify that which has served a people well in the past. Reification here means the concretizing of an abstract idea to such an extent that it ceases to give life. This inquiry into how a people come to know is of such critical importance that care is taken that we not fall prey to the lure of desiring to know that which we do not know that we do not know. This is the sacred center that is an integral part of the *fa'a-Samoa*. Neil Postman equates this to the incessant propensity of the television to produce answers to questions that have not been asked.³⁰

A concern that did surface is fluidity. The issue is that which made invisible the boundaries between conversations and interviews, field notes and autobiographies, observation, and participation. Often in the field, one starts with the intent to interview and ends up with a conversation, and if the conversation is unstructured and takes on a “life of its own” with a weak signature, then it becomes an informal conversation. There was one instance in the field when the participants were not comfortable with the idea of capturing the interview on video camera, and the incident morphed from a formal interview with prepared questions to a cathartic rendition of “things wrong” with our

²⁹ A direct outcome of this is the annual contribution Rev. Elder Liki Tiatia and the Dominquez Youth give to the Tafesilafa'i Festival. Aunty Teri Rotter of Alpine Village contributes dinner space for the leader's forum. A one-on-one with John Cobb gave me the appreciation of process thought that I could not have attained just by reading about it. A conversation with Sven Ortquist, the Samoan master wood carver, gave us a peek into his soul and how he view God. Several one-on-one conversations with Phil Campbell, a homeless veteran who frequents our church, have gifted me with the ability to see God's long mercy over the years.

³⁰ Neil Postman, Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1985), 83-98.

community.³¹ Ostensibly, I went into the conversation with the distinct idea of doing research; however, the exchanges turned out to be problem-solving in nature and, when I reflected on the actual incident once again, it was mostly self-expressing conversations. The appearance of sociability masks a real condition of social starvation, in which everyone left that conversation feeling so lonely, angry, unfulfilled that the research itself seemed hardly worth the bother. John Taylor Gatto refers to this as a symptom of the “lost art of rhetoric,”³² because we place so much attention on problem solving and self expression that we were not able to figure out the instrumentality of how the other person is talking. Thus, I failed to benefit fully from their experiences and was not able to help them understand mine.

In another incident when I thought the written agreements adequately addressed ethical concerns about the research, field participants were found continuously negotiating and renegotiating the written agreements, requesting clarification of the purposes and expectations of the study as the research progressed, even going as far as asking, “what is in it for me?”³³ In the context of the research these incidences function as a reminder to the researcher against sojourning into either the paralysis of excessive self-criticism or the blindness of overconfidence.

³¹ The interview was between Chief Gafatasi Lemusu and Iupeli Amiatu in Bellflower, CA. It also occurred during several instances in which the invitation to participate in a live TV interview was extended and was politely rejected.

³² John Taylor Gatto. A Different Kind of Teacher: Solving the Crisis of American Schooling (Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Hills Books, 2001,) 214.

³³ This is the Gardena Experience. In a church of about 50 parishioners, I gave a presentation about Tafesilafa'i, soliciting responses to a questionnaire that I created. I traveled with Nancy Mailoto and while the questionnaires were passed out, a middle aged woman raised her hand to ask “what is in it for me” and I smiled and told her “there is nothing for you in this questionnaire.” We distributed coffee mugs during the presentation and collected 38 questionnaires.

In educational research one can say that narrative inquiry exists on the boundaries of two dichotomous “master narratives.” On the one side are the “reductionist” research traditions that require the breaking down of phenomena into analyzable parts. This tradition often commits the sin of generalizing, trivializing or reducing important phenomena, while amplifying less important ones. On the other hand, the “formalist” tradition begins to work from theoretical positions and looking at the particular from a distance. This tradition is often accused of being insensitive, irrelevant, formal, and out of touch. Narrative inquiry as utilized in my research works on the borders of both these traditions. While it is true that research, done poorly, can fragment, reduce, and generalize human experience, not all who parse stories into theoretical lenses for reading lived landscapes are without grounded and useful data. Some narrative inquirers, for example, have brought theory to bear in such a way as to disclose the unconscious, the suppressed, the marginalized, the too-early-to-tell, and the un-nameable, actually releasing specificity and authenticity instead of generalizing them. A good example of this is one-on-one work that I do with various persons in our community. I start with the theory: All are kin. Then through questions and conversation, I am able to take them on a journey of exploration of the unconscious, what they do not know they do not know, inviting them to be in touch with their inner most self, and reflecting on specific events in their lives to bring about an authentic peace within themselves, seeing the world as more friendly and less hostile.³⁴

Some have even suggested that narrative inquiry celebrates the personal, while theory tends to obscure it. This may be true in some cases, but not in all cases. In the

³⁴ This process is detailed under the Tafesilafa'i Curriculum discussed in Chapter 6. The theoretical is placed in dialogue with the actual bringing forth a world of possibilities.

field, when the narratives are shared, the energy comes from personal experiences. The catharsis and the celebration occur in the realm of the personal and it is illumined by theory. In between the energy bursts, what is left standing is theory for ease of transportation. What I have noticed in my research is that some turn to theory in order to think through the pain of their lives and to imagine better alternatives. For them, theory is personal and is celebrated as an integral part of their own autobiographies.

Narrative inquiry also informs how I have facilitated discussions and interpretation of the interviews in the field as well as for myself as the interviewer. This inquisitive process complements the grounded theory methodology described above, in that it provides a means of reflecting upon and analyzing the data generated while “in action,” and thereby it frames future actions. I have used two narrative techniques in reflecting upon the conversations. One technique is to ask questions: How is that working for you? Why are you telling me this? How do you feel? How are your relationships? What happened? What did you have that mean? The second technique is what I call: How it is landing here. It basically takes a persons proclamation and repeating it to them using some of what they have said, asking if that is what they meant.³⁵

Narratives have served to conceptualize and preserve memories, handing down experiences, traditions, and values from past generations; their utilization further triggers social meanings imbedded in the narratives. In the case of the Samoan diasporic community, narrative further serves as a *malae* or sacred ground where settlement,

³⁵ These techniques were acquired and refined during Tafesilafa'i conversations as provided for in the Tafesilafa'i curriculum. These techniques are an attempt to raise the consciousness of the participants as to how the universe operates and invites the participants to react accordingly.

connection, and community occur.³⁶ Every village in Samoa has a *malae*, and each *malae* has a narrative of the origin of its name. In the process of invoking the name of the *malae*, the story and the narrative, which traces back to antiquity and the beginning of memory, triggers enlightenment, transformation, and knowledge of the *va* or relationships. For example the *malae* for the village of Aua is called *Paepae Ulu Po 'o* (which translates to “field of skulls”). During life-cycle events that pertain to the villagers of *Aua*, invoking the name of their *malae* has the effect of displaying, expressing, and paying respect to the village and their inhabitants, endowing them with significance. While there is a pronounced absence of the physical *malae* in diaspora, the role *malae* plays continues in the narratives. During a funeral in the community, for example, the *malae* of the village of the decedent will always be referenced, thus endowing significance to the bereaved family. Similar to how it is done in Samoa, the *malae* is referenced as a place where the loss has occurred rendering significance to the decedent, the survivors, and the inhabitants. It also serves as an acknowledgment of the village. When the name of the *malae* is invoked in the diaspora, it serves two purposes. First it transplants the physical *malae* from Samoa to the United States with all its boundaries, *sa*, *faiga*,³⁷ and storied history. If you were blind and were attending the same funeral both in Samoa and in California simultaneously, you would not know the difference in the oratorical presentations. The talking chiefs would reference the *malae* in their presentations regardless of whether they were in Samoa or in Pocatello, Idaho.

³⁶ *Malae* are the meeting grounds where the ancient gods met and held council on earth. It is an open space in the middle of the village. Each *malae* is given a unique name and a narrative that goes with the name.

³⁷ *Sa* means sacred and *faiga* means protocol – together it connotes granting due respect and the appropriate *va* to an heir of the village.

And in that sense the physical *malae* survives the migratory process and is duplicated in the diaspora during life-cycle events. Secondly, invoking the *malae* in diaspora during the life-cycle events underscores the profundity of the occasion; it intensifies the awareness, it renders the occasion worthy of remembrance, by assigning it a spiritual existence. It also creates an expectation for newness amongst participants such that the entire event can be characterized as a “teaching moment.” It is not so much the mentioning of the sacred space in Samoa, as it is the entire infrastructure pulling for maintaining the *va*, showing respect to a person, endowing folks with significance, giving someone their due using gestalt language, and poetic imagery.

Narrative inquiry is also used to verify data gathered from the interviews since much of the data gathered through interviews is subject to diminishment over the years. Field notes, interviews, journals, letters, autobiographies, and orally told stories are all forms of narrative inquiry. In one instance, one of the questions that invariably came to the fore during the research was: How do you define success? While the respondents all seemed to have some idea about success, it took additional probing and invitations for them to share a story of what happened to begin to flush out what success means to each person and, invariably for each family. I looked at how each family lived, the pictures in their homes, their electronic appliances, proximity of their house to their home church, and other coding related data. Journal entries and notes were taken while at the homes and interviews were conducted with families several times and various observations were made. In instances where this was not possible, I have constructed my own narrative of the conversations and interviews using such conventions as scene and plot.³⁸ As Jean

Connelly and Clandinin note, "Research is a collaborative document, a mutually constructed story out of the lives of both researcher and participant."³⁹ Narrative inquiry is found to be appropriate to many social science fields and is often used in disciplines such as literary theory, history, anthropology, drama, art, film, theology, philosophy, psychology, linguistics, education, politics, nutrition, medicine, and even aspects of evolutionary biological science.

Flexibility and openness are some of my strongest suits, and as a researcher I consider myself a truth-seeker, open enough to be persuaded and flexible enough to allow for counter arguments. Whether the purposes of our efforts are for practical applications or for scholarly development, as a truth-seeker, I cannot escape the fact that our ability to discover, understand, and communicate "truth" is dependent upon our views of what is real, and about how we will know "truth" when we find it (and to some extent how to communicate that to others so they get it). Stated another way, this research is grounded in my beliefs and assumptions about the nature of reality and about our "ways of knowing" and rules for accepting truth. It is for this reason that qualitative analysis and grounded theory, particularly coupled with narrative inquiry, works well for our research. As an analyst, I have developed a large capacity to sustain an unusual amount of ambiguity. Not that I do not want to pin down things analytically, but my urge to avoid uncertainty and to come quickly to closure is always in dialogue with the realization that

³⁸ Some interviewees were less than comfortable with my taking notes or filming them on camera. So at the end of the exchange, after I leave the home, I would take time to jot down the major themes of our conversation, lifting out some recurring terms during the conversation and jotting in the back of my journal the physical descriptions of the place where the interview took place. Having visited over hundreds of households over a ten year period, I have acquired an eye for what bothers the community, and these challenges can only be surmounted one relationship at a time.

³⁹ See Rich Gazan, "Imposing Structures: Narrative analysis and the design of information Systems." Library and Information Science Research 27 (3), (2005): 346-362

life is precious, occurs in the infinite now, and cannot be taken for granted. Furthermore, these tissues of meaning are complex and their significations are constantly in flux; the common Samoan fishing term *fa'ata'ata'a*, “let her play,” finds a natural home in this work⁴⁰. Grounded theory, in combination with narrative inquiry, works with the notion of theory as process and is most appropriate for this inquiry. It proposes to analyze information, while interactively generating theory. Grounded theory also recognizes the need to go into the field in order to see what happens, to authenticate that experience, to test it as theory, and to ground that theory. As such, this methodology lends itself well to the question at hand: how do Samoans come to know?

Description of the Method

In anticipation of properly grounding this work authentically in the Samoan community in diaspora, care has been taken in collecting the data over a ten-year period to ensure that any emerging theories are given ample time, space, and relationships to work themselves out in community. One of the critiques leveled against qualitative methodology is that it utilizes non-representative sampling, with findings based on a single case or a very few cases.⁴¹ Having my research period extend over ten years

⁴⁰ *Fa'ata'ata'a* is Samoan for “let her play.” When a big fish is caught on a hook, the fish will put up a fight to free itself. An experienced fisherman would give the line a quick tug to make sure the hook is in tight, then he will let the fish play, until the fish grows tired and then the fisherman reels the fish in without a struggle. Gathering good data from the community often requires experience and patients.

⁴¹ Steinar Kvale, Interviews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996); Magarete Sandelowski, “Sample Size in Qualitative Research,” Research in Nursing and Health 18(1995): 179-83; Gladys McPherson and Sally Thorne, “Exploiting Exceptions to Enhance Interpretive Qualitative Health Research: Insights from a Study of Cancer Communication,” International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 5(2), Article 1 (2005); accessed January 30, 2008 from http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/5_2/html/mcpherson.htm

lessens the impact that non-representative sampling may have on the data and also allows me to look at more than just a few cases. Because grounded theory consists of constant and continuing comparative analysis⁴² it is often used with any kind or mix of data, and particularly with qualitative data, if only because the methodology is self-adjusting and offers a systematic analysis whose purpose is to generate an inductive theory about a substantive area. The end product is an integrated set of conceptual hypotheses. Stated another way, grounded theory is an analysis of the qualitative data being collected and the dynamic interrelationship that the data has and continues to have with hypothesis development and, ultimately, theory generation. Grounded theory is data collection, data analysis, and theory generation organically in conversation with one another in the researcher's world.

In the diaspora, the Samoans are found gathering around churches, so in anticipation of grounding the work authentically I worked specifically with three prominent church groups – Congregational Christian Churches of Samoa (EFKS), Congregational Christian Churches of American Samoa (EFKAS) and the Congregational Christian Churches of Samoa in America (EFKSA) all of which represents 42 churches and over 800 families.

The Grounded Theory method of inquiry as it pertains to this project includes the following steps: (1) Engage in communal social interaction. I attended life cycle events in the Samoan community to gather data for research. Life-cycle events are meaningful, cathartic, life giving events that gather the community in the diaspora.⁴³ Examples of life

⁴² Glaser and Strauss, Discovery of Grounded Theory, 1.

cycle events include funerals, weddings, *saofa'i* – title bestowing, or dedications of buildings. The importance of getting out in the field to discover what is actually happening cannot be overemphasized. Much can be learned just by being present. Life cycle events I attended included several funerals, a church dedication, a mortgage burning, several cultural festivals, and other social events. Other sources of data included field notes, narratives, participant observations, and semi-structured interviews. Because Samoans live communally, have their being communally and think communally, an appropriate initial station for data collection is when the community gathers. Communal in this sense means a connectedness which extends backwards into time and outwards into the larger world; it is not just limited to what is readily observed and the immediate connections. It is a unique realization that one is not alone. Parker Palmer refers to this connectedness as the only place where real learning happens--when the student, the teacher, and the subject are brought into relationship with each other.⁴⁴ Any research methodology that is not informed by this diminishes our knowledge and does not fully capture the richness located in history and in the extended community. Life cycle events historically gather the Samoan community in diaspora and thus play a prominent role in this inquiry.

(2) Interact with key participants in each event. The relevance of the data collected to the development of equally relevant theory is a discipline that must be honed in the field. The role of key participants is necessary to appreciate the complexity and variability of phenomena and of human action, and how persons are actors who take an

⁴³ The Samoan term for life-cycle-event is *fa'alavelave* which literally translates as problems. Ostensibly the community is noticeably gathered during times of trouble.

⁴⁴ Parker J. Palmer, *To Know As We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1993), xvi.

active role in responding to problematic situations. Key participants⁴⁵ are those persons who occupy certain infrastructural places in the community during the life-cycle event. In the case of a funeral, key participants include the surviving spouse and children, *matai* from both the decedent's extended family and the surviving spouse's extended family. Interviews were conducted in both Samoan and English and the data were collected initially in journals, later in audiotapes, and still later in video recordings and formal program write-ups.⁴⁶ Because Samoans think communally, each member is delicately woven into every other member: the individuals are represented in the key participants and vice versa. While each member can serve as a unique data source, much of the contributory and relevant data is present with key participants for any given life-cycle event. In other words, for every life-cycle event, certain members play key roles, and therefore their roles as active respondents during each event are more contributory to the research question – How do they come to know? As an example, take the bestowing of a *matai* title or a coronation. The event takes months of planning and this is after the extended family reaches a consensus and settles upon whom their *matai* will be. If one has not participated fully in the identification and selection process that culminated in the eventual bestowing of a *matai* title, then their knowledge of what constitutes “truth” in the community is not as complete as someone who has participated fully in the entire

⁴⁵ Key participants are members of the extended family of the person in the center of the *faalavelave* or life cycle event. Each individual is member of at least four different extended families. In a church dedication, each couple that holds membership in the church, conceivably can have 8 different extended families involved in the dedication from this one member family of the church.

⁴⁶ Life-cycle events in the Samoan islands tend to occur without proper documentation, either on audio, video or in printed materials. The tool that came in handy was the journal. I noted that when a person is seen taking notes in the Samoan community it makes those being observed uncomfortable. Throughout the course of the research not once did anyone approach me asking what I was noting down.

process. Those that have participated in more than one process also would have a deeper and broader knowledge about epistemological structures in the Samoan community than someone with only limited experiences. During the actual *matai* coronation ceremony, key participants have had much coaching along the way; they have refined their knowledge, and only that which is important and relevant ends up at the service of the research question: How do Samoans come to know? Most in the community are relegated to being spectators or *tapua'iga* during these life cycle events, which means their roles are those of the prayerful. While this role is important communally, the limited resources will not allow much interaction with them, and the nature of the research question leaves little room for questioning prayerful spectators. One realizes that there is a tremendous amount of data that is “left on the table” by virtue of leaving these respondents unexamined, however, the scope of this inquiry cannot accommodate them at this time.

Since life-cycle events occur throughout a person’s life, when one is a member of the community for an extended period of time, one will eventually serve as a key participant in a life-cycle event or *faalavelave*. Thus, key participants were interviewed during the gatherings because they were more sensitive to the event and are in a better position to contribute authentically to the research question: How do you know?⁴⁷ A brief description of a key participant was provided earlier, and the criteria for a key participant are given below. Since the period in question spans ten years, different

⁴⁷ When referring to the basic research question, I assume that how the question is structured govern its place on the epistemological continuum, so to ensure that there are many data points covered during the research, the question is formatted slightly different each time to give the inquiry a “process” nature and to couch non-quantifiable questions in the process of becoming. Again, the question is phrased differently for the purpose of connoting process and “being under construction.”

persons have gone through life-cycle events and this has a tendency of evening out any abnormalities in the data and increases the density of the data. By density we mean: “all salient properties and dimensions of a category have been identified, thereby building in variation, giving a category precision, and increasing the explanatory power of the theory.”⁴⁸ This is similar to how some instructors, in order to elicit participation and to extract community building and contributions from students, would ask students to not speak more than twice during a session.⁴⁹ The intent here is so the aggressive and vocal speakers find themselves sifting through their communications and only communicate that which is essential. And the quiet ones find themselves with a new freedom to contribute their insights as they have had time to ponder the issues longer. When this technique is applied to key participants, it functions similarly to ensure that all have a voice and that conversation is not dominated by a few participants. In the context of this study, because of the extensive period of data collection, there was an adequate and representative sample of “students” contributing authentically grounded data to the research. Since all events were life-cycle events, invariably as many as thirty persons eventually participated as key participants and their contributions were noted.

In relation to interviews, care was taken to ensure that groups were small enough to encourage participation and were of the same gender and social rank to ensure authentic horizontal contributions. There is a Samoan art form called *faafaletui*, or informal discussion, in which everyone around the circle is afforded an opportunity to share, contribute and be contributed to. These sessions often serve as ways to transfer

⁴⁸ Strauss and Corbin, Basics of Qualitative Research, 158.

⁴⁹ Palmer, 80.

knowledge to the youth as well as serve as community-building exercises amongst the elders. Often these gatherings form around cocoa pots, *tanoa ava*, or other forms of common nourishment. Similar to the ideal classroom environment, everyone is granted the opportunity to participate. Instead of the leader putting down hard and fast rules, everyone is governed by the *va* or their relationship with others in the sitting. The *va* can be characterized as a state of being which renders one ontologically conscious of, and sensitive to, the spiritual, physical, and divine interconnectedness of all beings. There are certain built-in mechanisms that ensure that one does not monopolize the conversation, as this would not be considered maintaining proper *va*.

(3) Analyze interviews using narrative inquiry and I kept journal entries in the research journal; these entries were compared to later entries and analyzed. Interviews were audio taped, transcribed and analyzed, constantly comparing them to previously transcribed and analyzed interviews and further comparing them to other journal entries, for the purpose of isolating recurring themes or emerging concepts. Video recordings were reviewed and analyzed, constantly comparing them to previously reviewed and analyzed recordings, and constantly comparing them to other data and journal entries, all the while looking for emerging patterns, recurring themes, or coding paradigms. The patterns and constantly recurring themes were documented and reflected upon in the various focus groups both formal and informal, and the results were noted in the journal entries.

The model of inquiry used is patterned after that developed by Clandinin and Connelly⁵⁰ with some modifications. Clandinin and Connelly started from the basis that social sciences are founded on the study of experiences and therefore experience is the starting point and key term for all social science inquiry. This begs the question: What constitutes an acceptable study of experience? Clandinin and Connelly acknowledged two positions. On the one hand, there is the epistemological position that experience cannot speak for itself and that the best we can get is a representation of experience in the form of text; text means any form in which experiences are captured, maintained, and transmitted. Hence, meaning is embedded in texts and in the forms by which they are constructed, and therefore the study of the construction of texts and their deconstruction seemed the proper focus of any inquiry. While it is easy to see that this line of thinking may be associated with a sociological and critical perspective, which bodes well for our research study, Clandinin and Connelly saw it however, as an affirmation of social organization and structures, rather than people and their experiences, as the appropriate starting points for inquiry. Clandinin and Connelly refer to this approach as “formalism”. The life-cycle events observed throughout this research are often formal rituals whose meanings are not only distorted amongst the Samoan youths but are often lost amongst their counterparts in diaspora. The study of life-cycle events and how people participate in them proves consistent with Clandinin’s and Connelly’s idea of persons and their experiences as an appropriate starting point for inquiry. On the other hand, as these events become burdensome in the Samoan diaspora and their value in community building is diminished with regard to the people and their experiences, then these events

⁵⁰ Clandinin and Connelly, 3-18.

will cease to attract people or capture their experiences fully. When that happens, the study of these events will be, as Clandinin and Connelly feared, more an affirmation of social organization and structures than the people and their experiences. To ensure that one does not displace the other, I kept a constant dialogue open between the two with mutual respect. What that looks like in the field, are telephone calls to the leaders and key members of the community, participation in community activities, and strategic partnering with other organizations.

The other position Clandinin and Connelly refer to is one they call “reductionism,” often referred to as “technical rationalism.”⁵¹ This is used to describe the model underlying traditional professional practice. This is a position embedded in the epistemology underlying traditional science, which sees professional knowledge as problem-solving made rigorous by the application of traditional scientific theory and technique. From within this position there is a disconnect between knowledge and its application, between theory and practice, between the knower and the known; professional practice is reduced to skills and abilities in applying firmly bounded and standardized scientific knowledge arrived at from a positive affirmation of theories through strict scientific methods. Because of the nature of this disconnect, this frame of reference argues that experience is too complex, holistic, and next to meaningless on its own, and therefore insufficiently analytical to permit useful analytic inquiry. My research takes these two polarities in the narrative inquiry continuum and builds a bridge between them, all the while mindful of other possibilities along the continuum that would

⁵¹ Clandinin and Connelly, 2. See also Donald A. Schön, The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action, (London: Temple Smith, 1983) and Donald A. Schön, ed., The Reflective Turn: Case Studies in and on Educational Practice, (New York: Teachers College Press, 1991).

lend themselves well to a documented and meaningful inquiry into the question of how Samoans in the diaspora come to know.

(4) Formulate a hypothesis. Word coding is often used to refer to the first part of the analysis that concerns the naming and categorizing of phenomena through the close examination of data.⁵² After coding the data, the researcher then seeks emerging themes and overarching propensities, and this part of the analysis can be viewed as moving from the particular to the general.⁵³ Certain themes are discerned, and codes are connected to each other in what can be conceptualized as a web of meanings. Both by coding and by analyzing data, I use my personal knowledge and experiences as tools to make sense of the material.⁵⁴ In the spring of 1997 when the idea of attempting to stem the flow of Samoan high school dropouts in diaspora began to mobilize several leaders of the Samoan community in Southern California, I started to ask other leaders in the community questions such as “Why are Samoans here in the US?”; “Who are we?”; “Where are we going?” and “How will we know when we get there?” These were not unique questions; however they have not yet been asked of the Samoan community. I looked at some of the models that were in existence for gathering the community similar to those in the Samoan island environment from which we came, and I also reflected on my upbringing in Samoa; the youth rally model was the one instrument available to us with which most were familiar. The Samoan word for youth rally is *mafutaga* which means fellowship. In Samoa oftentimes, these fellowship events include spending the

⁵² Strauss and Corbin, Basics of Qualitative Research, 55-73.

⁵³ Grant D. McCracken, The Long Interview, (Newbury Park, CA Sage, 1998), 37-42.

⁵⁴ Strauss and Corbin, Basics of Qualitative Research, 87-163.

night at the host village. This act of hospitality is often reciprocated by the guest youth. We came up with the name for our gathering, Tafesilafa'i, which means "to face one another," and we made it into a cultural competition as is done in the islands. Then letters were sent out to local Samoan church pastors asking if their youth group would participate in a cultural competition. Five church youth groups attended the first and there were over 500 in attendance. Just a handful would participate in the competition; the rest would watch. Comparing this first event to other subsequent events over a period of ten years, I have formulated an hypothesis, to be tested later, about novelty and the role it plays in gathering the community: People gravitate to novel experiences. This first event has been compared to other life-cycle events, and this idea is refined as other core ideas are allowed to emerge to explain similarities, differences and variability in interactions.

(5) Confirm Emerging

Theories. Once a core idea emerges, new data are sought to confirm or disconfirm the elaborated concepts and the relationships among them. This confirmation concerns the ability of the theory to be generalized, the consistency and reliability of the findings, and whether the findings move us towards the research question: How do Samoans come to know? Many of these tests were performed intuitively by me at all stages of the research process. This process continued until no further insights into these relationships in terms of the core idea were revealed. In the example noted above with the first gathering, the hypothesis that people gravitate to things new, was explored at other life cycle events such as church dedications, funerals, and other *mafutaga* over the years; it was found that the "novelty hypothesis" does not hold true for all gatherings. When compared to a church dedication for instance, it was discovered that folks gather because of their

relationships with others in the community. The idea that people interact because of ongoing alliances has now emerged as a more efficient, parsimonious, and viable explanation for interaction with others, displacing the “novelty hypothesis.” Though both these theories may be accurate to some extent, parsimony will not allow us to entertain both at this time. When the first hypothesis was compared to other life-cycle events, the idea of the “*va*” or complexity of relations came up.

(6) Define Theories. The term used by Strauss and Corbin is “theorizing,” which entails not only conceiving and intuiting ideas or concepts but also formulating them into a logical, systematic and explanatory scheme.⁵⁵ Developing an idea into theory still requires that an idea be explored fully and considered from many different angles or perspectives. The implications of a theory are also important and must be explored. These formulations and implications result in “research activity” which entails making decisions about questions and acting in relationship to them throughout the research process.⁵⁶ Clearly, any resulting theories emerging from the data must be constantly compared and contrasted to previous data and modified, extended, or deleted after the comparison. At the heart of theorizing is the interplay of making inductions and deductions among the hypotheses that have emerged from the raw data. The resulting grounded theory is intended to be a rich, powerful, succinct, and parsimonious explanation of the investigated phenomenon. The research question: “How do Samoans come to know in the diaspora?” should result in a theory that ought to have density, move

⁵⁵ Strauss and Corbin, Basics of Qualitative Research, 21-24.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 22.

people, and offer a generative explanation of how learning takes place in the Samoan community in the diaspora.

(7) Take it back to the community. The theories of how Samoans organically come to know will be shared with the wider religious education community. Events where these theories play out in the diasporic Samoan community will be highlighted and translated for the benefit of the wider community, creating opportunities for empowerment. If the community is as intact as it should be, then sharing with the community will occur naturally, seamlessly and effortlessly. In the diaspora where the community is fragmented and disconnected, perhaps getting it to them may be a challenge.

The data gathering began in the summer of 1997 when a group of concerned leaders in the diasporic Samoan community, which included me, observed their community trailing in the “good society” averages. The traditional benchmarks often used to determine how a group is doing – such as employment, health, wealth and education – were used in evaluating our community, and indicated they were low and in some cases non-existent.⁵⁷ The question of Why? came to the fore almost immediately. Community leaders wondered aloud why that was the case and whether we could do something about it. Many of the problem statements covered elsewhere in this dissertation were in existence at the time. The first Samoans immigrated to the United States in the 1900’s after the Cessation Treaty was signed in April 17, 1900. After more

⁵⁷ Data on Samoans were combined under rubric of Asian Pacific Islander such that the metrics of the Samoan community were distorted at best and non-existent at worse. It was only during Census 2000 that the Samoan data were bifurcated from the Asian data into a more ethnic sensitive category the Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islanders.

than 100 years in the US, there is still evidence that the Samoans were somehow left behind. Intuitively, if there were a well concerted effort to properly address this plight, and if we were to make a difference for generations to come, the initial place to begin this work would be with the youth and young adults. Those between the ages of 7 and 17 were seen as most profiting from our stand in taking on some of these problems. In 1997 the Tafesilafa'i festival started in order to intentionally gather the community to think about these challenges.

Variations in the Field

Social Interactions: One of the overarching themes, biases, and almost-always-applicable factors that I brought to the research was the importance of exhibiting and maintaining proper *va* in order for authentic, cathartic and life-giving social interactions to occur. Reflecting on the research done, I note that all of the engagements in communal social interactions were by invitation only. The mortgage burning, the funerals, the weddings, the language conferences, the luaus were invitation-driven events, and I was invited mainly because of my role in the community as a local church pastor. I also noted that the invitation was personal and it did not come through e-mail or letter, but through personal contact. Therefore, it is safe to assume that participation in life cycle events in the Samoan community is a function of your relatedness to key participants. There is no question within the context of this research that proper “*va*” or “the human connection” is an integral ingredient in getting in a position to effectively gather grounded data from the Samoan community in the diaspora; it certainly has been the case with this inquiry. “I know you,” “Are you related to?”, “Where in Samoa are you from?” represent the most frequently noted beginnings of particular conversations with members of the

community. This pattern of initiating conversation through the establishment and discernment of the appropriate *va* before generative conversations ensue was sufficiently strong that I was tempted to articulate the behavioral patterns and themes within it as key to invoke the requirement of proper “*va*” across all life cycle events. It is necessary to keep in mind that proper *va* means a relationship that garners a state of well-being, happiness, peace, enjoyment, and satisfaction.

In general, people preferred to be acknowledged as individuals, with some elements of their unique persona, their extended family, and their religious connections or preferences entering into the relational context. They seem better able to transcend the awkwardness and chattiness required for interacting and building rapport when these familiar, person-centric, non-verbal dialogues and emotions are permitted within the life-cycle-event encounter. However, in working with the data over the years, we became acutely aware that each common pattern within this phenomenon of wanting to have proper *va* revealed significant variations that proved instructive to our analysis. There were those for whom the social, non-technical, secular, and emotional elements of constructing proper *va* might be interpreted as meeting the needs of the immediate family rather than of the community. This underscores a moving away from a reality that is communal to that which is less communal, and more provincially inscribed. Key participants framed the life-cycle event within the context of the entire community, and they did not see it as an isolated occurrence.⁵⁸ Then there were people for whom

⁵⁸ Key participants in life cycle events are often beneficiaries of communal generosity and well wishing and will readily receive the maintenance of the *va* as a communal activity in which they participate. Young people during funerals when the extended families show up to comfort them, are often overwhelmed by the showing of respect and the maintenance of the *va*.

technical engagement was most assuring, for whom emotional expressions were disconcerting, and for whom getting down to business was far more important than building community by getting to know each other as individuals. This view apparently was often shared by those with a diminished sense of the Samoan way and who saw the life cycle events as personal, private and isolated occurrences. These were usually the entrepreneurs, persons in the workforce, and those with a diminished sense of connectivity to the Samoan community.

Taking these exceptions into account, we were led to develop the theme of having proper “*va*” in a manner that transcends the descriptors by which we most typically measure and articulate it. Proper “*va*” becomes a highly individualized, iterative, and interactive phenomenon within which there is an equally broad range of effective communicative responses. This is quite a departure from how the *va* has been traditionally viewed and constructed in the islands, which was usually a highly communal, dogmatic, and stoic phenomenon with cues given by a limited number of invisible, arbitrary, and artificial communicative gatekeepers. This insight was distinguished midway into the research period and continues to inform incoming data. It also nuances the current reflections on previously collected data.

Key Participants: At the beginning of the research, though the intent was to capture as much data as possible about social interactions in the diasporic Samoan community, as the research progressed it became obvious that this would be a much too daunting task; it would delay our findings and ultimately minimize its utility. “Consider this work similar to dancing on a pin” was the advice that I received from members of the committee.

Hence, the decision was made towards the last three years of data collection to interview only those considered to be key participants in life cycle events. Neil Postman discusses how the selection of television personnel to anchor a news broadcast has also suffered from this trend to reductionism leading to selecting only those personnel that fit a certain pre-defined idea of an anchor newscaster and robbing the viewers of the diversity in anchor personnel.⁵⁹ Though the number of key participants varied depending on the type of event, attempts were made to interview as many individuals as possible. In cases where the interview took place at a different time and location after the event, interview questions were designed to place the interviewee in the space of the past event and to elicit their response while in that state. Most of the questions were open questions, with a few closed questions for clarification purposes only. It was clear that the decision to limit the interviews to just key participants would have an impact on the later development of relevant theory; however, the impetus to push in this direction arose and was honed entirely in the field and as such is authentic and grounded. It has also led to the appreciation of the complexity and variability of the phenomena of human action and how the examiners are key actors as well, taking an active role as they respond to the unfolding situations in the field. The extracting of only key-participant responses has now necessitated a decision as to how best to deal with the contributions made by non-key participants. This decision is outside the scope of this work and will not be discussed.

Another reason given for interviewing only key participants is that they are perceived as more “grounded,” meaning they have better access to the *fa’avae* or

⁵⁹ Postman, Amusing Ourselves to Death, 101.

fundamental interactionary process, from a participatory perspective as well as a reflective perspective, and as such they can contribute effectively to the research question: How do we know? Key participants also occupy a venerable space that is often eschewed by the western proletariat when they refer to not wanting to “put someone on the spot.” In the case of a funeral, one of the key participants is a chief who represents the decedent’s family. In the events that culminate in the burial of the decedent’s body, there is a certain *fa’avae* or protocol that he must follow prior to, during and after the burial in relation to the decedent’s spouse’s family, his own family and all other families that are gathered during the event. The ultimate purpose of making sure these protocols are followed is to maintain proper “*va*” which in this context means building strong extended family ties. This chief and similarly charged key participants are burdened with the responsibility of making sure the event is *manuia* or life giving, a blessing, and so well regarded that people look forward to the next gathering, thus building strong families and strong communities. Not every participant in these events is so pressured, and thus the reason for interviewing only key participants.

Smaller Focus Groups: One of the insights garnered during the research period is the importance of smaller focus groups to the authentic exchanging of ideas within the research context. I came to this insight when we began to observe two phenomena. First was the reluctance of the interviewees to be videotaped, enlarging the audience with whom they would be sharing their stories. In an age where we usually assume that everyone is comfortable in front of a camera, there were many instances where the participants were adamant about not being subjected to the video recording. When asked why, many initially gave what seemed to be superficial reasons such as, they are not

photogenic enough, they may say something wrong, or they are not well prepared. However, when pushed further they eventually gave reasons that coalesced around Samoan phenomena such as *ma* (shame), *matamuli* (self conscious, bashful), and in the case of having too many in a group *fa'atauva'a* (modesty). The second phenomenon observed was the longer periods of silence when the focus groups grew too big. It was noted that the larger the focus groups the less free flowing were the expression of ideas. The same reasons, pointing to phenomena that impeded videotaping of persons and conversations, were also operating with regard to the size of the group.

The advantages of having focus groups are obvious as they allow the examiner to study people in a more natural setting than a one-on-one interview format. As most persons are found connected to others naturally in community, a focus group tends to mirror that natural relationship better than isolated interviews. A focus group also charges the process of narrative inquiry, making it more multifaceted, stimulating, and interesting. The number of participants in each of the original focus groups was initially kept in the 8 to 12 range, but as the years progressed it was discovered that smaller groups of 3 to 4 were not only naturally occurring, but were more readily put together and better managed. This ideal size of mini focus group is what I have come to call *faletui* or house of kings,⁶⁰ borrowing from Samoan antiquity when only those in high places are found talking, sharing and thinking together.

Another observed phenomenon was the correlation between the expression of ideas and the amount of time the group had been together. Initially, there was a “get to

⁶⁰ Women also have their own *fa'afaletui* or groups of just women, in which they discuss women specific issues. *Fale* means house, *Tui* means king. *Fa'afaletui* means “like the house of a king.”

know each other curve” that did not allow the free flow of the exchanging of ideas; then after enough time passed, proper *va* was established to counter the *ma* (shame), establish a common ground so members could let go of their *matamuli* (self conscious, bashful) and determine that we all have something to contribute, while realizing that *fa'atauva'a* (modesty) tended to be false as it did not apply. Similar to the treatment of the interviewees, care was taken to ensure that each person was given an opportunity to contribute.

Analysis of data

The data that I have collected over the years have been further segregated, stored, and fitted into the neat boxes that I have come to call life-cycle events. As overwhelming as the resulting data archive has been, it pales by comparison to the data collected that did not fit neatly into these boxes; there were data about the Samoan community and how reality is constructed, but since this data could not be fitted easily to a life-cycle event or they came from a non-key participant, they were discounted. Reflection on how this process has unfolded in the larger context of qualitative inquiry has convinced me that failure to attend to these out-of-place data within my research will have deleterious consequences to the end results, particularly if I intend to portray my findings as having some value. It is very clear that moving from data collection to sampling to analysis has a distilling effect which functions to distinguish only one unique angle of vision from which to understand a phenomenon.

The act of qualifying receptacles to receive data is itself oversimplifying and self-selects so that the results come only from a certain perspective. Yet the implication of this is often lost as I continue to use the one perspective intending to generate a comprehensive understanding of that which I am studying. When I fail to appreciate the singularity of my perspective, I also fail to recognize the value in differing perspectives. An example can be found when a *matai* from the islands travels to the US for a life-cycle event. His failure to appreciate his handling of building proper “*va*” as being only one perspective, prevents him from recognizing the value of other family members and their contributions to building proper *va* and family ties; these different perspectives that other family members bring are often characterized, by the single minded *matai*, as undermining the extended family.⁶¹ Our research has shown that this unflinching, staunch position has caused members of the extended family to withdraw their support from the family during life-cycle events. This demonstrates the continuity and discontinuity in the Samoan tradition due to the diaspora.

Hypothesis Formulation: In the course of this research, we purposefully extended our data generation and research time in order to overcome some of the inherent limitations of shorter studies and to strive toward findings that have some potential for real life application. To have a sufficiently diverse and representative sample and to theorize intelligently about how Samoans come to know in the diaspora, I created a data set of 22

⁶¹ *Matai* means chief. In the Manu’a Islands (US Territory), all *matais* are male. Females cannot hold titles. Each *matai* can only hold one title and there is a limited number of titles to go around. In American Samoa (US Territory), all paramount chiefs are male. Only paramount chiefs can be elected as Senators and thus the upper house of the Am Samoa Legislator is all male. There are some female *matais* in American Samoa but not many, and they do not participate in *faletui* or *matai* meetings but are acknowledged in women’s circles. In Samoa (Independent Country), *matais* are both male and female and there are usually many persons holding the same title.

life-cycle events. I have amassed over a hundred hours of videotaped interviews with male and female elders in the Samoan community, over two hundred hours of hands-on experience gathering the community and capturing these experiences in journals, audio tapes and video recordings. I have taught over a hundred hours of various classes on the importance of understanding our culture and knowing who we are and how we are “wired” so we can begin to live fulfilled lives, free of oppression and despair, while soliciting responses and continuously comparing these to previous data. Had I relied on a smaller sample, the research would not have had the same impact, and I might not have captured the essence of the *fa'a-Samoa*, since some of the life events, as the term implies, occur only but once in a lifetime.

What was our resulting hypothesis? That Samoans are gifted with a unique cosmogony, language, culture and *fa'a-Samoa* and thus they come to know in unique ways as well. Because we have structure the data collection as such, the hypotheses is sufficiently rich, powerful and encompassing.

Challenges Encountered and Impact on Theory Creation

Focus Groups: Focus groups were composed for the purpose of reflecting upon theories generated from the grounded research. These reflections were captured and refined by using the communal lens, and brought up-to-date in light of new knowledge and new community resources through the process of questions and answers. As some of the data were collected over a period of more than ten years, previous findings from these focus groups would also provide a secondary analysis of my material. As some of the data were collected with fewer numbers in a focus group the issues were further refined and

authenticated with a “smaller” audience. Field notes were kept sporadically over the years which created an unintended mirroring of the waxing and waning of rhythmic educational opportunities in the Samoan community throughout the context of the research. As with any method asking persons for their opinion as oppose to asking how they would react, focus groups can produce inaccurate data because the participants may think I am asking one thing when actually I am asking another. I have tried to minimize this by using concrete examples and sharing with them what others have said about similar issues in different settings, by getting them to reflect more deeply about the issue, by hoping that they would see possibility for transformation. In some cases, I have actually taught critical thinking to some, fertilized the cerebral process for others, and engaged most of them in more serious thinking.

For example, in the Spring of 2002, I ran several focus groups getting people to reflect on the research question: How do Samoans come to know? The setting was a group of three local church groups in Long Beach, gathering for a youth rally and the number of youth and young adults present were around 100. The group, after the opening service, was given the question – How Do Samoans come to know? The plenary session elicited several responses that were “humorous” “polite” and “preliminary;” the group was further divided into smaller groups of 15 persons discussing one of the four ways of coming to know which was discerned from the research, [1] through the senses [2] from the past [3] through proverbs and [4] in community. In addition to their feed back on how Samoans come to know, all of the groups were invited to reflect on the events of 9/11 on the Samoan community and what that means to the Samoan community in the diaspora. The events leading up to the tragedy were relived. We explored how our

community would respond to similar disasters, how we have reacted to these types of events in the past and how we can find that which is worthwhile in the tragic death of over three thousand persons. The large group drew responses that were superficial; however, as the groups got smaller, as they became less diverse and as they were invited to push forward, deeper conversations ensued. There was a sense of ownership of what happened, which led to the affirmation that if there is change in the world needed, it has to begin with ourselves and our community.

The impact of focus groups on theory creation is that focus groups quickened the process tremendously making it easier to generate, compare, and discard theories. The impact of smaller focus groups on theory creation is that it added an element of ambidexterity to theories that was not available in larger focus groups. Focus groups are perceived as a less time consuming and a less expensive way of collecting qualitative data, shortening the “lets think about this for a minute” portion of the reflection. While the research period was such that it allowed for over seven focus groups to populate around the how Samoans come to know, the immediacy of the events of 9/11 did not allow us to spend much time on this question, before we were taken up by the next issue. the impact of the 9/11 attack and the most anticipated retaliatory strike against Iraq.

Researchers Role as an Insider: Throughout the research period there were a number of contextual features present in the community that either constrained or facilitated research activities. Salient among them was my role as an insider. As an insider in this qualitative research, I was allowed to see things in the data that others would not have seen. My role as an insider has also given me a natural way of relating to my subjects as they tended to respond to me as someone they are familiar with and that they can trust.

As an insider I could assume this trust, while an outsider may have had to develop it. However, my role as an insider could also have desensitized my view of the data by missing certain things that are so familiar to me that they are givens. As an insider, I can miss these givens, as these items would usually occupy a blind spot in my line of sight. Validation of the data within the focus groups did give me a different set of eyes with which to check my analysis.

I played many different roles in the community throughout the course of this research and I have relied on these different roles to help identify key participants, gather, and analyze the data. It is truly not possible to determine if people would have changed their responses to me on account of one role or the other; however, I am relying on the dynamics of the *va* to give me the best possible picture of truth in the research process.

Writing about an Oral Culture: Another real challenge is the inability of the written word to capture the smells and sounds of Samoan music, language, singing and cooking. Neil Postman sees music as a mood setter providing a leitmotif to the stories.⁶² The impact on theory creation of the inability of the written word to capture the sounds of Samoan music and singing is double sided. First it limits the theories that are available to us to only those that are word-centric. The written word has so captured, domesticated and transformed time in the social context that it has created all sorts of challenges for oral communities. Secondly, it does not fully capture the cadence, the staccato of the music, nor the rhythms of how people use time and space in and oral culture. Time and space in themselves are part of the meaning of the conversation. Then there is the influence of

⁶² Neil Postman, Amusing Ourselves to Death, 102-103.

smell of the cooking and fragrance of the flowers. How can the influence of these “non-writing” elements be accounted for and factored into a theory of how a people know?

Lost in Translation: The language divide is also a challenge as there are some ideas that lose their meaning when translated into English. Careful examination of any translation will reveal that there is always something that is not properly translated from one language to the next.

The Water We Swim in: The milieu of the Samoan community is in its infancy or fast disappearing in the diaspora because there is too much television in the community. There is a diminishment of the public *malae* and public discourse. Postman talks about this new milieu which revolves around the television and how the medium is the message and so it has become.⁶³ People have said that most believe every thing they see.

Summary: This chapter described in detail the methodology used in researching the research question: How Samoans come to know? It noted some variations in the field that can only be characterized as “further grounding” of the research data. Variations in the field were noted and challenges encountered were reflected upon; the impacts that these challenges have had on theory creation were suggested. In describing the methodology, a historical backgrounds of grounded theory and narrative inquiry were discussed, connecting these methods to the field and to the work of discerning the various ways of knowing. Particular applications in the field were highlighted, variations were

⁶³ Neil Postman, Amusing Ourselves to Death, 3-15.

noted, and suggestions for incorporating the data were offered. This leads us to the next chapter, which is the context of research, distinguishing social infrastructures that we engaged during the research.

CHAPTER 3

Context of Research

Any given finding usually has exceptions. The temptation is to smooth them over, ignore them, or explain them away. But the outlier is your friend. A good look at the exceptions, or the ends of a distribution, can test and strengthen the basic finding.¹

M. B. Miles and A. M. Huberman, Qualitative Data Analysis

Epistemological Infrastructures

This chapter covers the social, religious, and political infrastructures in the Samoan community in diaspora. Infrastructures present in Samoan are distinguished from their counterparts in the diaspora because these structures impede, inform, and enhance education. This chapter also discusses some of the challenges Samoans have to overcome in order to survive in the borderland. Neil Postman suggested that media impacts epistemology because “the concept of truth is intimately linked to the biases of *forms of expression...which is a way of saying that “the truth” is a kind of cultural prejudice.”*² Similarly, Samoan social, religious, and political infrastructures color, adorn, shape, and support “truth” in the Samoan community and thereby impact how Samoans come to know. This chapter describes epistemological infrastructures in the original Samoan community, underscoring the complexity of the task to educate, transform, and influence a people, and points to the arduous discipline of understanding.

¹ M.B. Miles and A.M. Huberman, Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook 2nd ed., (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994), 270

² Neil Postman, Amusing Ourselves to Death, 22-23 (emphasis is mine).

let alone transforming, a community. These epistemological infrastructures were distinguished from the research done in the Samoan diasporic community. Research activity included reflection on communal practices, identification of communal knowledge sources, the role students and teachers play in creating and sharing knowledge, and the explicitness of knowledge-creating inquiry. In defining the context in which the research was done, I will distinguish social, religious, and political infrastructures that are present in diaspora and that can also serve as dispensers of knowledge for the community.

Communal Infrastructures

Immediate Family: The basic unit of community is the *aiga* which is a portion of the *aiga potopoto* or extended family living in close proximity in diaspora or under one set of roofs in Samoa. In this basic unit of community the children are birthed, nourished, and receive their initial education. My hope is for an educational design and a pedagogical construct that is sensitive to existing communal infrastructures, knowing that these provide basic support structures that establish the elementary preconditions for a culture of inquiry to emerge. These epistemological constructs may not explicitly determine the modes of knowing or learning results, but they are designed to offer opportunities for eligible activities and “to promote a self-organizing process in which ideas keep getting better.”³ Based on the research the following constructs were discerned and found emerging in the Samoan community:

³ Marlene Scardamalia and Carl Bereiter, “Does Education for the Knowledge Age Need a New Science?” European Journal of School Psychology 3(1)(2006):31.

- *Religious infrastructure* – these structures parallel the Judeo-Christian religious structures introduced to the islands by Christian ministries in the early 19th century. These Christian structures were contextualized in Samoa and then imported back to the diasporic Samoan environment. Prior to these religious infrastructures there was a protocol called the *ava* ceremony which constituted formal worship in the Samoan family.⁴
- *Social infrastructure* – these are mostly indigenous structures that have sustained the *fa'a-Samoa*, the Samoan way, in the Islands. In contrast to western social networks, which tend to have a narrow way of allowing people to associate, these Samoan social structures create vitality in communities and families by expanding the ways in which people are allowed to associate. When transferred to the diaspora these structures offer a slow, counter-hegemonic, organic process of self-awareness, self-discovery that tend to render harmless the experience of marginalization in diaspora. As such, these structures may be seen as a threat to formal educational networks.⁵
- *Political infrastructure* – this is referred to as the *fono* or meeting. This political mechanism that developed in the islands is used to keep law and order. The *fono*, meeting functions similarly to how the *matai*, chief functions in the *aiga*, family;

⁴ Fanaafi Aiono Le Tagaloa, Tapua'i: Samoan Worship. (Apia, Samoa: Malua Printing Press, 2003), 81-95. See also the KVZK-TV production titled "Aliitaeao: Faleula o Fatua'iupu o le Gagana Samoa." This is the *ava* ceremony during the Samoan Language Conference with the theme "Fai Sou Samoa Lau Gagana." held at American Samoa Community College, Mapusaga, American Samoa June 20, 2005.

⁵ John Taylor Gatto, Dumbing Us Down: The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling. (Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 2005), 47-48.

namely it is a dispenser of justice, law, order and peace. Duranti characterized the *fono* as a discourse in conflict management⁶ and observed that the *fono* is where reconciliation occurs through *talanoa*, talk, and where everyone strives to reach a consensus pulling for the best solution for the community as a whole.⁷ The diasporic version is in its infancy as it finds itself on the margin, interrogating, when possible, the entrenched dominant ideology. Paulo Freire reminds us that to teach is to intrinsically have a political presence, but he cautioned that the educator's task is to encourage human agency, not mold it in the manner of Pygmalion.⁸

Village in Diaspora: Beyond the immediate family is the *nu'u*, the village, which sustains and keeps safe several families within the geographical boundaries of the village.⁹ In the village, members of the *aiga* are birthed, nurtured, and allowed to exhibit a sense of adventure, independently coming to know on their own, socializing with their peers in other *aigas* in the *nu'u*, and, when called upon, they are prepared to perform some community service with joy and catharsis. John Taylor Gatto refers to this as a "curriculum of family"¹⁰ which serves as an umbrella over, and a foundation for,

⁶ Alesandro Duranti, "Code Switching and Conflict Management in Samoan Multiparty Interaction." *Pacific Studies* 12(1)(1990):1-30.

⁷ Alesandro Duranti, "Politics and Grammar: Agency in Samoan Political Discourse." *American Ethnologist* 17(4)(1990):1-23.

⁸ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage*. (Lanham, MD: Rowmand & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1998), 10.

⁹ Aiono-Le Tagaloa, *Tapua'i: Samoan Worship*, 84. *Nu'u* not only describes a physical location, it also refers to the *matais* in the area when they gather. It is the multivariate nature of Samoan words that makes it appropriate for transplanting in the diaspora.

¹⁰ John Taylor Gatto, *A Different Kind of Teacher: Solving the Crisis of American Schooling*. (Berkeley: Berkeley Hills Books, 2001), 18-20.

everything else. In the absence of a village in diasporic communities, the church becomes the vessel in which attributes of the *nu'u* and community are gathered, maintained and nurtured. Hence the context in which education is done best in diasporic communities is within the churches; thus the reason that establishing churches has been the primary task of Samoans in the US, is that it is the closest approximation of a *nu'u* or village in Samoa, and it also is the place where you will find the *matais* gathered. The church is a means of bringing people together that closely resembles how communities are assembled in the Samoan islands. While the villages in Samoa have clearly defined social, religious, political, and geographical boundaries, in the US the gathering is of people from different social, religious, and political backgrounds and geographical areas in the United States. Similar to how villages function in Samoa, the churches and the community they have created and maintained in the diaspora have become the context in which much of learning occurs. Accordingly, for education to be carried out properly in the Samoan context in diaspora, the churches have to be empowered and strengthened.¹¹ The churches have to take the initiative of providing both spiritual leadership and secular leadership for the community. The churches can no longer afford to focus just on the spiritual realm; they must also focus on the secular and the mundane. Land, buildings, and physical structures are important in gathering a people because these physical structures serve as a focal point where people can gather; they serve as villages in the diasporic community. It is very important for a church family to have their own building for sustainability and survival.

¹¹ This was one of the insights garnered from the research and from paying attention to the Samoan community in the diaspora. Because there are no defined villages, the churches are the closest authentic communities in diaspora. Churches are the only existing infrastructures that can support a contextualized culture of learning in the diaspora.

Implied in all of this is the fact that relationships are important, and many of the social interactions in the community are for maintaining these maternal and covenantal relationships, which constitute the *va*. Much of Samoan social interaction is about making sure that these relationships are respected, nurtured, and fundamentally acknowledged. Maintaining these connections is the reason why a typical Samoan funeral takes weeks, because relatives travel from far away places to pay their respects to the deceased and the body is held over until family members arrive; in state side life cycle events, family members from afar require additional time to assemble the resources necessary to pay for travel expenses. This is how relationships are maintained: through attendance, paying respect and offering of assistance. This is how connections are maintained throughout the community. This is what community building looks like in the Samoan community.

A parent passed away in our congregation and there was such an influx of well-wishers from the local church families that the third generation children were moved by the experience that they vowed to continue to explore the Samoan culture and stay engaged with the church. In most western paradigms, the basic unit is the individual. In this structure, individuals are often expected to fend for themselves, or the immediate family unit is expected to be a self-sustaining unit. I see a trend with Samoans heading in that direction, at the expense of their life-long ties with other members of the extended global Samoan family.

Extended Family: Another basic unit of community in the Samoan context is the *aiga* *potopoto* or extended family. Lowell Holmes did an anthropological case study on the Samoan extended family, underscoring that this much larger version of the *aiga* is more

fluid than one would find in a western setting.¹² While Neil Postman argued convincingly that the social requirement that children be formally educated for long periods “led to a reorientation of parents’ relationships to their children”¹³ which in turn led to the emergence of the modern family, the Samoan family came into existence out of the necessity to survive and thrive. The environment called for gathering persons to till the land, hunt the forest, and fish the water. Only an extended family would survive under those conditions.

In the diaspora, there is a necessary re-evaluating of the appropriate form for the *aiga potopoto*, to allow it to survive in the jungles of California. While Neil Postman saw the roles of parents in this newly constituted social construct as “...guardians, custodians, protectors, nurturers, punishers, arbiters of taste and rectitude”¹⁴ focusing on literacy, the Samoan parents’ role, in the Islands as well as in the diaspora, continued to be that of owner, landlord, securer, molder, mentor, and epitome of taste and rectitude, focusing on character formation. In other words Samoan parents continue to be actively engaged in the lives of their children and themselves are equally impacted by the joys and setbacks that their off springs experience. Said another way, Samoan parents are not just custodians of their children, but they are their children and their children are an extension of who they are.

The Samoan extended family is a system consisting of a group of people related by blood, marriage, or adoption, acknowledging a common allegiance to a *matai* or

¹² Holmes, Samoan Village, 19; see also Mead, Coming of Age in Samoa; and Elinor Ochs Talking to Children in Western Samoa, (reprint Language in Society, 1982), 77-104.

¹³ Neil Postman, Disappearance of Childhood, (New York: Vintage Books, Random House Inc., 1994), 44.

¹⁴ Postman, Disappearance of Childhood, 44.

chief¹⁵. The *matai* regulates their activities, and each member of the *aiga* pledges their allegiance to their *matai*. The *matai* assumes the trustee functions over family affairs, titles, land, and personal property and is often expected to settle disputes and family problems. My wife's father, for instance, holds the *matai* title *Paepae* from the village of Nua and Seetaga, American Samoa. The *Paepae* title signifies the one who co-founded and settled the village of Nua and Seetaga in American Samoa. As such, the title comes with certain rights, privileges and control of land and resources. Under *Paepae*'s leadership are a total of twelve couples for whom he is responsible and with whom he plans together. These families are mostly young, untitled couples who give their allegiance to *Paepae* and are in some way connected to the family, though four of the couples do not live in Samoa. With such a structure in place, it is clear that any transformation, education, and conversion of the *matai*, assuming all other social structures are functioning well, inevitably leads to the transformation, education, and conversion of the rest of the extended family. The *matai*'s decision on all matters pertaining to the family is final and is generally respected. All family affairs are settled through the process of *talanoa*, talking. The *matai* calls the *talanoaga*, and after the *matai* hears from all members of the family, he then shares his views and invites them to support his decision. A good *matai* has the ability to hold his family together and effectively persuades dissenting members that the greater good of the family and the community will come about by deciding the issues a certain way. This was the main reason why Christianity became widely accepted in Samoa because the *matais* decided to

¹⁵ Shore, 2. This system of governance is only loosely adhered to during day to day life in the diaspora; however, it continues to be relied upon for direction during life cycle events, when the community resorts to social pieces that offer comfort.

accept Christianity and so entire families converted without individually understanding what it means.

In diaspora, the extended family structure is modified and the role of the *matai* falls on the Church Pastor and on the Moderator of the Church, usually a deacon or an elder person from the congregation. John Taylor Gatto refers to this as the congregational principle, which is an act of monumental localism.¹⁶ This has been a natural phenomenon for Samoans traveling abroad.¹⁷ They tend to gather initially around their denominational counterparts in the United States and eventually form their own church. This was how the first Samoan churches came to be organized in Southern California. In these smaller congregational families is hidden a great irony: "...this way of life demands individuality, not regimentation."¹⁸ Meaning that these smaller congregations had better emulate the individuality of each *aiga potopoto* and captures the essence of a Samoan village well in the diaspora. So in spite of the strong dominant western cultural influence, Samoan communities who have acquired control of their own "facilities" are equipped with the tools to maintain their language, culture, and way of being, as they have already demonstrated a tremendous resilience to change. Though theological support for maintaining the language and culture of our ancestors is not there yet, Samoans in the diaspora have demonstrated the ability both to straddle both worlds, incorporating the technological changes while clinging fast to their cultural values and the *fa'a-Samoa*. Evelyn Kallen referred to the *fa'a-Samoa* as "at once a world view; a

¹⁶ Gatto. Dumbing Us Down 73-94.

¹⁷ Research has shown that Samoans in New Zealand, Australia and other parts of the world behave in a similar manner. Their first inclination is to find a Church in which to worship and eventually when enough Samoans gather, form a Samoan church, not just to meet their "religious" needs, but their cultural needs as well.

¹⁸ Gatto, Dumbing Us Down, 76.

way of life; a cherished heritage; a set of structured principles for ordering social life; a plethora of formidable constraints upon behavior; and an ideological underpinning for strongly positive ethnocultural identification.”¹⁹ To that list I would add, the *fa'a-Samoa* is a web of social interconnections that blesses the world.

Village Proper: Another unit of community is the *nu'u*, village, which is delineated by a geographical boundary with a storied past, but it is also characterized by a *fa'alupega*, salutation, which is a prose narrative that details key elements in the identity of a village. Neil Postman would equate *fa'alupega* to the Athenian art of rhetoric, which was not only a “key element in the education of Athenians (far more important than philosophy) but a preeminent art form. To the Greeks, rhetoric was a form of spoken writing.”²⁰ A *matai*, a chief schooled in the art of rhetoric, can just hear the *fa'alupega* and tell you the village reference. When properly delivered, the *fa'alupega* renders respect to the village and its inhabitants.

Perhaps the modern ear would hear such rhetorical renditions as an ornament of speech, often pretentious, superficial, and unnecessary, but to the Samoans, *fa'alupega* is an indispensable means of organizing evidence and proof and also a means of communicating truth about the villages and the boundaries that surround them. This is true as well with other oral communication tools such as the *lauga*, speech and the *solo*, poem. Fluency in *fa'alupega* also indicates the deliverer’s awareness of certain ways of relating respectfully to others. When delivered during life cycle events, it functions as

¹⁹ Kallen. Western Samoan Kinship Bridge, 5.

²⁰ Postman, Amusing Ourselves to Death, 22.

the highest form of respect for key participants in a ceremony. The *fa'alupega* is used exclusively in formal settings, celebratory services and in *faalavelave*, life cycle events. Each village in Samoa has a specific salutation, handed down orally from generation to generation, which delineates and gives respect to the founders of the village. In essences, it is a list of chiefly titles and their ranking in the village, the first being the highest ranking chief. Each salutation has remained constant since the founding of the villages, and thus most talking chiefs have them committed to memory.²¹ There are a total of about 160 villages in Samoa²² which consist of the Islands of Upolu, Savaii, Manono and Apolima; and there are 53 villages in American Samoa which consists of the islands of Tutuila, Aunu'u, Ofu, Olosega and Tau. Each village has its own unique *fa'alupega*.

The salutation references several important components: [1] the Paramount Chief of the village; this person historically founded the village or was given the stewardship of the village from the creator god Tagaloa. [2] The Secondary High Chiefs – they are given a collective name but are understood to be persons with leadership roles in the village; [3] the Talking Chiefs – they speak on behalf of the Paramount Chief and the High Chiefs; they sound the alarm and announce what the Chiefs have decided in the public arena. In very rare cases, and often politically motivated, and only after years and years of service, another Chief's name may be added to the village salutation, but generally *fa'alupegas* are god-given. Each *fa'alupega*, salutation is a micro-cosmogony for each village, but it

²¹ Every High Chief has a Talking Chief that speaks on his behalf in the public arena. Not everyone gets to speak in public arena. And every Talking Chief has a Taule'ale'a (chief in training) who does the bidding of the Chief and Talking Chief. Those with the power are usually quiet and say very little in public. One of the insights we gleaned from the research is: power is always hidden.

²² Le-Mamea, and revised by Te'o Tuvala, T.E. Faletose and F.L. Kirisome O le Tusi Faalupega o Samoa: Savai'i, Upolu, Manono ma Apolima. [forms of address for chiefs in different villages] (Apia, Samoa: Malua Printing Press, 1981), 1-160.

serves to connect that village to the master cosmogony and Samoan creation story. The following is an example of the salutation of my father's village of Olosega in Manu'a.²³

Afio Tui Olosega ma lau malelega (Tuiolosega)
Susu lou Usoalii (Seumaala, Tuipolo, Vo'a)
Susu le Nofoao (Tagaloa, Ena, Tivao)
Maliu mai oulua To'oto'o (Malemo, Malaepule)
Mamalu mai oulua le Toga, o lau toga Ape ma lou to'oto'o, o Niuatoa
*Ma upu ia te oe le Olosega.*²⁴

Come King of Olosega with your proclamation
Honorable brothers to the crown
Honorable chairs of the King
Presenting the voice (for the King)
Welcome the fine mats for Ape and the voice of Niuatoa
And words appropriate to the people of Olosega

Depending on the village and the context in which the salutation is used, these salutations may be abbreviated, improvised and loosely held together to fit the occasion. All this, suggests that such salutations form the social infrastructure that contributes to how appropriate and useful knowledge is passed down throughout the Samoan community and point to how the *va* is properly maintained; knowledge of the social infrastructure frames that which constitutes what Gardner referred to as “multiple intelligence” in the Samoan context.²⁵ Hence, to have knowledge of social connections, and the ability to remember

²³ Each person has at least four sets of families. Their father's mother's side, father's father's side, mother's mother's side and mother's father's side. Olosega is considered my village on my father's father's side. Uafato is my village on my father's mother's side. Saanapu is my village on my mother's mother's side and finally Tanugamanono is my village on my mother's father's side. Each of these villages has their own unique salutation.

²⁴ Over the years I have committed this to memory and this is recollected from memory. The recitation of the *fa'alupega* varies from orator to orator, from context to context; it varies temporally in concert with the time of the day and it also varies in relation to those present. This is to say that it is a breathing and organic concept, honoring someone and giving them respect. During each recitation, it is never exactly as presented here. Orators are at liberty to rearrange the order and insert and delete some names based on the occasion. The western equivalence politically is perhaps acknowledging the president of the US, members of Congress, Senators and the Justice system.

and recite the different *fa'alupega*, arms a person with the skills to inform and enhance transformation, education, and conversion. While knowledge of these salutations may not serve as currency in any other community, this knowledge is most valuable in Samoan circles. Fumble or misapply a salutation and you lose your audience and, in some cases you will be politely asked to move on. This is one of the fears of all orators. Surprisingly, this infrastructure survives in diaspora, as Samoans continue to seek peace and harmony away from their motherland.²⁶

Social Structures in Diaspora: The village structure, like other Samoan indigenous social structures, survives the diasporic experience in the language. It is carried in the heart of a Samoan and is verbalized and attended to in the diaspora using the Samoan language wherever Samoans gather. As an example, in the absence of a physical *malae*,²⁷ village square, Samoan religious leaders and a group of Chiefs living in Long Beach, California organized Tafesilafa'i as a pseudo-*malae* that would serve to gather people. Tafesilafa'i means, among other things, "let's get together." It started as a conversation among community leaders and has morphed into a private, non-profit 501(c) (3) organization designed to preserve and revitalize Samoan culture and language among people of Samoan heritage living in Southern California. Tafesilafa'i is also a *talanoaga*, conversation that addresses much needed needs of Samoans as well as others in the

²⁵ Howard Gardner, Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences. (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 62.

²⁶ Research shows that during life cycle events in the United States, only passing reference is made of the proper salutation of the villages involved. The work of respecting this tradition and passing on these salutations are left to the orators and talking chiefs who have this information committed to memory. Nonetheless, the rightful leaders of the villages are given due respect.

²⁷ *Malae* means open field. It is a place where the communal life of a village is put on display. It is the village square, it is the town center, it is a place where people gather, and social interaction occurs.

greater community. The purpose of Tafesilafa'i was twofold: first, to continue to showcase the traditional roles of care, service, and leadership for Samoans in the diaspora under the rubric of the *fa'a-Samoa* and, second, to function as stewards of the Samoan culture among those living in the diaspora. It is supported by the notion that the Samoan culture is a gift that ought to be preserved and not discarded as an impediment to assimilation.

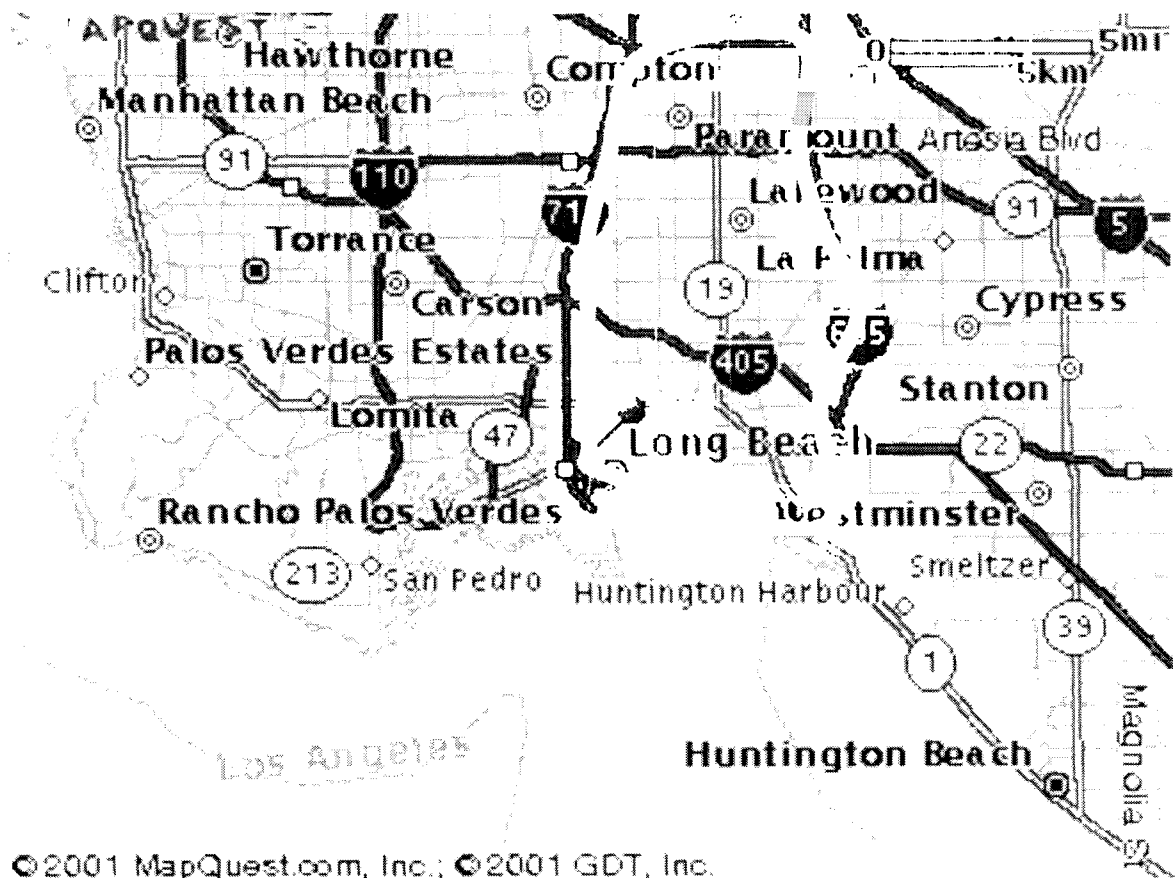
Over the years, churches have sprung up and sponsored a variety of projects designed to preserve, protect and enhance the Samoan culture. In addition to sponsoring festivals, Second Samoan Congregational Church sponsors Le Manai, a sundries store, which offers affordable Pacific Islander products and supplies to Samoans in the area. Tafesilafa'i also sponsors a youth group which meets every Sunday afternoon to address issues relevant to today's youth--preparing for their future, doing well in school, retooling for the computer age, developing new friends, avoiding drugs, gangs, violence, etc., all within a context of their God given Samoan heritage. Although we recognize that an emphasis on *fa'a-Samoa*, or the Samoan way, will not immediately stem teen pregnancy, prevent drug addiction, nor wipe the graffiti off the walls of our neighborhood, we do know that it helps to create a sense of community for our young people, and community creates dialogue. It also guarantees what John Taylor Gatto calls "dissonance" inside the community which would allow all members to engage in what creative thinkers called "the dialectic"²⁸ eventually leading towards truth. It also encourages our youth to understand that they belong to an ancient and proud culture that even in diaspora has much to contribute to the dominant society. Moreover, it eases the pain of cultural

²⁸ Gatto. Dumbing Us Down, 76.

dislocation by helping them to recognize that they belong to the larger Samoan culture in their native country as well as in diaspora. The immediate-term goal of our community is to improve the comprehension and balance the use of the Samoan language by Samoan youth.

Research Sites

According to a survey conducted by the United Way of Greater Los Angeles in 2003, there were more than 49,000 Pacific Islanders in Los Angeles County. However, according to religious leaders who know of Samoan residents and families within their congregation (who do and do not attend church), they estimate that approximately 29,000 Samoans live in the area where most of our research sites were located, representing approximately 4,142 households. Forty-five churches are established in authentic Samoan neighborhoods throughout the area. Fifty five percent of the research sites fall within the City of Long Beach, with the 91 Freeway as the northern border, the 710 Freeway as the western border, the 605 Freeway and Studebaker Road as the eastern border, and the Pacific Ocean as the southern border. This area is shown below:



Eighty percent of the sites are located in California with the balance located in Samoa.

In addition to geographical barriers, the following are other barriers that have kept the community from coming together:

- The absence of financial incentives for large gatherings. There is a tremendous energy generated when the young people come together. Many smiles, and much sharing and goodwill are generated during these events, as well as a tremendous amount of grassroots volunteer work. However, the minimal incentives and financial support for putting these events together must come from elsewhere. When compared to life cycle events, it is without

a doubt that these events are put together by only those who are committed to the cause of gathering a community under a common banner.

- The pressure of assimilation. This pressure leaves little time, energy, or even interest in the personal or communal preservation of one's original culture.
- The need to respond to immediate problems. Samoan-related organizations often must address the more immediate and critical problems of poverty, familial disintegration, and cultural dislocation that many of our Samoan families face.
- The erosion of regard for the Samoan language among Samoans. Many Samoans still suffer from colonialism, thinking that the Samoan language is inferior to the English language.

As with all immigrants, their goal and reason for immigrating to the United States was to secure a better, more prosperous life for themselves and their children. However, the pressure of adjusting to a fast-paced technologically sophisticated way of living from that of a quiet, cohesive small island economy has brought as much suffering and heartache as it did progress and prosperity. Samoan families found themselves not only confronting a mysterious and often alienating new culture, but also found their family structures--the bedrock of Samoan life--fractured by the adjustments they had to make to assimilate in this new, more individualistic land. The younger generations were eager to leave their Samoan culture behind in order to "fit in," and the older generations had little, if any, time or energy left to preserve Samoan ways as they tried to make their way in this new world.

However, the loss of the *fa'a-Samoa* is not only limited to Samoan in the diaspora, the use and command of the Samoan language is diminishing even in American Samoa. Both English and Samoan are spoken by almost all Samoans living in Samoa – English for official use and Samoan for everyday use. However, according to the American Samoa Department of Education, English is thought to be the more prestigious language to speak, especially among the youth.²⁹ As a result, the command of the Samoan language is diminishing with each generation, not only among Samoan émigrés, but also within the motherland as well.

Religious Infrastructures

Even before Christianity was introduced to Samoa in 1830, Samoans had been a religious and a pious people, in the sense that they had an awareness of such concepts as *tapu* or taboo, *feagaiga* or covenant, and *tuaoi* or boundary; so much so that the highest form of religious piety is when all are living in peace and harmony. One strives to be in harmony with the cosmos, harmony with the environment, harmony with one's neighbor, and harmony with one's self. These existing infrastructures enhance and inform education in the life of every Samoan. According to Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese, the religious logic that sustains the Samoan search for harmony is premised on Samoan indigenous narratives of creation. For ancient Samoans, it was a logic that operated more as a "collection of related principles and metaphors that gave meaning and connection

²⁹ "American Samoa Language Arts and Culture Program," a report by Bernadette Manase, Elisapeta Luaao, and Mataio Fiamalua. Findings of the American Samoa Department of Education presented at the International Samoan Language Commission 2003 Annual Conference in Los Angeles December 2003.

rather than as a religion with set theological parameters.”³⁰ Said another way, the Samoan indigenous religion was based on the Samoan social construct which is the *aiga* or family rather than abstract theological musings; religion then becomes much closer to a way of being that is uniquely *fa’a-Samoa* or the Samoan way of life. In the process of sharing the narrative of the family, village and district, genealogy, history, and religion become intertwined and education results. In this most basic learning context, metaphors, proverbs, and stories operate as powerful tools for conveying a message and sharing a narrative. The message, when promoted and repeated over an extended period of time, becomes a religion, in the sense that the messages become our answer to the question that religion ought to ask: “What about God, cosmic mind and love, exalted in principle above all else, the only indestructible, all inclusive yet individual, being?”³¹ Over the ages, the central message of peace and harmony has been refined and has percolated to the top as testament to the wisdom and insights of Samoan forefathers and mentors and offered as part of their legacy to Samoa and all humanity in our continual quest for peace and harmony. Along with this quest come such ideas as: Human life is equivalent and complementary to cosmic, plant and animal life; all living things share equal status and power; the human is no less powerful or greater than the heavens, the trees, the fish or cattle and vice versa; these ideas are refined and now form the religious

³⁰ Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese (former Prime Minister of Samoa) from a speech given at the Samoan Language Conference in American Samoa, 2005, titled “Ina Ne’i Vale Tu’ulima La Ta Gagana” meaning – “Be Careful that You May Loose Your Language.”

³¹ Charles Hartshorne, Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes. (Albany NY: University of New York Press, 1984), 118.

infrastructure that enhances and augments “Coming to Know.”

Concept of the *Va*: Many social scientists would hasten to offer theories about the origin of Samoans.³² However, when a direct inquiry is made to genuine Samoans, as to their opinion of the origin of their people, indubitably they will refer you to the creation story and how the Samoan god Tagaloa created the universes which ultimately led to the creation of Samoans in Samoa. Answers to this and other identity-specific questions such as: How did it all begin? Where do I come from? Why am I here? Who am I? Where am I going? form the basis of the *fa'a-Samoa* or the Samoan worldview.

If the Samoan worldview can be summed up in a word it would be: *va* [vah]. Like many Samoan terms, *va* is a multifaceted term fraught with pluriformity and multiple meanings, some found in the context, others negotiated in the verbal unfolding of an oral-specific engagement, while still others are embedded in localized votives, which form the groundedness of a particular being. *Va* is first defined as the spatial distance between the creator and the creature. This distance has a physical component and an ontological component as well as a rhetorical component. When the *va* is properly maintained, it creates peace and harmony amongst the parties involved. Maintaining this *va* is the almost-always-existing imperative directing the creature to maintain the ultimate *va* with the creator in the act of *tapua'i* or worship. When we ask the question: Where is the self in relation to the *va*? Jeannette Mageo answers that the maintaining of proper *va* renders the self as not acting “on one’s own behalf, but as an

³² Thor Heyerdahl, *Fatu-Hiva: Back to Nature*. (London: Allan & Unwin, 1974). See also Peter Leiataua Ah-Ching, *Polynesian Interconnections*, (Morrisville, NC: Lulu Press Inc, 2004); also Peter H. Buck, *Vikings of the Sunrise*. (Auckland, New Zealand: Whitecomb and Tombs, 1954).

ambassador of one's group."³³ In other words, the Samoan self understands itself only through the maintenance of proper *va* with others. Though there are no Samoan terms that directly correspond to "personality," "self," or "character" these can be understood through relationships with others and when the Samoan self is found out, it is seen to be more sociocentric and in service to "others."³⁴ In the religious context the ultimate *va* is most pronounced as it dovetails with the Judeo-Christian act of worship and praise. This is perhaps why churches have occupied formidable positions in the Samoan community in the diaspora.

Economically, maintaining good *va* is measured in terms of giving instead of accumulation.³⁵ The explication of the well maintained *va* exists in harmonious relationships, peaceful boundaries, mitigated differences, thoughtful dynamics, cathartic connections, powerful affiliations, acute separations, and in the power to be.³⁶ It is the English proverb in action, "good fences make good neighbors." Additionally, maintaining the *va* connotes proper disposition, appropriate votives, salvific opportunities, healing behaviors, sensible conundrums, and joyful sorrows. Moreover,

³³ Jeannette Mageo. Theorizing Self in Samoa: Emotions, Genders, and Sexualities. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 81.

³⁴ Jeannette Mageo, "Aga, Amio, and Loto: Perspectives on the Structure of Self in Samoa." Oceania, 59 (1989) 3:181-199. See also Mageo, "Samoa Moral Discourse and the Loto." American Anthropologist 93 (1991):45-420. See also Mageo, Theorizing Self in Samoa

³⁵ The idea of an economic framework that is based on giving instead of accumulation, I think, may be the one unique contribution that the *fa'a-Samoa* can make to the capitalistic environment. When this tenet of the *fa'a-Samoa* is substantially implemented, when generosity rules, emphasis will shift from an economy of scarcity to that of abundance; poverty will cease to be a visible issue, because those with the means will be expected to be generous, and other social ills will cease to enslave those in community because there will be a strong sense of taking care of one another.

³⁶ The power to be, is the ability to stay engaged in the face of breakdowns and disconnects. It is coming to the realization that the *va* or distance can only exist in disconnects, breakdowns, *faalavelaves*. When the other is distinguished as different, a *va* naturally is created that must be paid attention to and maintained. The maintenance of the ultimate *va* is worship. Worship is reverence, silence and discernment. When the connection is made, harmony, peace and tranquility ensues.

minding the *va* calls for affirming life and embracing life-giving attributes; being conscious of the *va* calls for serious contemplation of persons and the relationships involved. Maintaining appropriate *va* takes time. When contemplating this project, for example, I was fully conscious of the *va* between the readers and the writer; at the same time, I was present to the *va* between the writer as an individual and the Samoan community whose cosmogony we are examining. During dark hours of soul searching I was even conscious of the *va* between my Judeo-Christian heritage, which frowns on things “paganistic,” and my Samoan indigenous heritage. I agonized over what to write, thinking: What if I am unable to say the appropriate things? What if I say too many things? What if what is said changes over time? How do I retract it? I was continually present to the implications of articulating in written format that which is vocal when authentically discerned and indescribable at best when taken outside the community and clothed in a foreign vernacular. From our research we have learned that the appropriate mode of sharing insight into the Samoan community is through stories, parables, and proverbs, for these modes seem specific enough to capture the essence of a thought and yet gestaltic enough to leave one wondering with possibilities.

Samoan Cosmogony: In discerning what else characterizes the context of this research, I would be remiss if I did not mention Samoan cosmogonies. Samoan cosmogonies come in two types, according to Roland B. Dixon – the evolutionary or genealogical type and the creative type. The evolutionary or genealogical type is similar to the Genesis 2 type of creation story where creation occurs continually. The creative type is similar to the

Genesis 1 creation story,³⁷ which creates *ex nihilo* and through proclamations. The cosmogonies of Samoa are mainly of the creative type, although there are certainly examples of evolutionary or genealogical types. The following is an example of an evolutionary cosmogony from O. Stuebel, A. Kramer, and Brother Herman's collection:

O le Tupuga o le Eleele ma Tagata

*O le tane ma le fafine, o le igoa o le tane o Afimusaesae, o le fafine o Mutalali. Na fanau le tama o Papaele. Na usu Papaele ia Papasosolo, fanau le tama o Papanofo. Na usu ia Papanofo ia Papauta fanau le tama o Fatutu. Na usu ia Fatutu ia Maata'anoa fanau le tama o Tapufiti.*³⁸

The Ancestor of Earth and Man

The male, Afimusaesae (flaming fire) and female, Mutalali, (flaring fire, like the burning of dry coconut leaf or paper). They had a son – Papaele (clay). Clay and spreading clay and the son was Papanofo (the rock that sits). Papanofo was married by Papatu (an upstanding Rock) and the issue was Fatutu (standing stone – fatu: stone, tu: standing). Fatutu married Maata'anoa (stone-rolling one) the son was Tapufiti (unmoving).³⁹

These records were oral accounts given to missionaries and ethnographers, memorized, and retold from generation to generation. Needless to say, versions and interpretations vary from informant to informant, village to village, island to island, and are often the subject of vigorous debates.⁴⁰ In keeping with maintaining good *va*, orators

³⁷ Roland B. Dixon, *Oceanic. The Mythology of All Races* v.9. Cambridge, MA: University Press, 1964. Reprint, New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1964, 18.

³⁸ Stuebel, Kramer, and Bro. Herman. *Tala o le Vavau: The Myths and Legends of Old Samoa*, 3. These collections were made in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Oskar Stuebel wrote the Samoan context. The publication of some of their collective research also provides an English translation by Bro. Herman; this accompanied translation was provided by Aiono Le Tagaloa.

³⁹ Translation by Aiono Le Tagaloa, August 2001.

have deemed it necessary to preface each version and interpretation with the expression “*e tala lasi le Atunu’u*,”⁴¹ meaning “this is just one opinion.” As such, authenticity and validity are a genuine concern amongst ethno-historians, and opinions and biases always accompany this inquiry. Again, with issues of authenticity, the *va* features prominently in relations between the researcher, the subject, and the different *va* or relationships involved. Maintaining proper *va* will not allow one version of a story to be told as “truth” at the expense of another.⁴² It is this propensity towards peace and harmony that explains why many of the stories of our collective narrative were never committed to writing, as committing it to writing would render it unchangeable and authoritative to some extent. Neil Postman talks about how typography has led to “an attitude toward the authority of information” which was one reason why the printed narratives were shunned, as they detracted from peace and harmony.⁴³ Even when telling stories or sharing information, the proper observance of the *va* is crucial in getting a potential listener to receive information. Information will not be given when the *va* is breached or not properly acknowledged. You can see this in the Samoan’s hesitancy in answering questions or *fesili*. When asked a question, the Samoan takes an inordinately long time

⁴⁰ Oskar Stuebel, intro., *O Tu ma Tala Fa’a Samoa Mai le Tusi a Oskar Stuebel* ed. John Charlot (reprint; Berlin, 1896; Pago Pago: Samoa News Press, 1973), i-ix. See also Augustin Kramer. *Die Samoa-Inseln: Entwurf einer Monographie mit besonderer Berücksichtigung Deutsch-Samoas*, vol. 1. *Verfassung, Stammbäume und Überlieferungen*. (Stuttgart: Schweizerbart, 1902). See also Oskar Stuebel. *Tala o le Vavau: Samoan Legends*, trans. Bro. Herman, et.al. (Pago Pago: Association of the Marist Brothers Old Boys, 1955).

⁴¹ This phrase literally means “the country has many versions of the story.” This rubric has created peace and harmony in the Samoan community, with the result that now “cultural truth” is negotiable, open to many and yet selective of a few.

⁴² In Eastern religions and indigenous religions, inner contemplation and intuitive understanding are primary routes to basic knowledge if not to God. See also Mary Belenky, Blythe Clinchy, Nancy Golberger and Jill Tarule, *Women’s Ways of Knowing: The development of self, voice and mind*. (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 54-55.

⁴³ Postman. *The Disappearance of Childhood*, 32.

before responding. This is because there is a subconscious preponderance of the *va*, the relationship between the questioner, the respondent, and the question itself. This is also because genuine information can only be revealed in the strictest of confidence and must be exchanged in a safe relationship of trust and respect where the established *va* is recognized, acknowledged and affirmed. Elizabeth Conde-Frazier noted that her Pacific Islander students are thoughtful in addressing issues and “speak only when they have wisdom to impart.”⁴⁴ In a question and answer context, if the answers were given easily they would most likely be inaccurate and would be a mere diversionary tactic to allow time to pass so the proper *va* could be established and maintained. To be successful in the extraction of any information from a Samoan, an understanding of this *va* is crucial.

The one operation that is absolutely essential for the development of theory is asking questions. Every type of inquiry rests on the asking of effective questions and in our methodology in particular the questions are directed at advancing our understanding of the theoretical issues. In the Samoan context, researchers often misconstrue the hesitancy in answering questions as an inability to answer a simple question.⁴⁵ However, to begin to respond to any line of questioning without establishing the proper *va* makes a Samoan uncomfortable, and the hesitancy is allowing for the proper *va* to be properly maintained. This takes the outward appearance of a general discomfort with being questioned, avoidance tactics, smiling, many affirmative responses; you can sense a

⁴⁴ Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, Steve S. Kang and Gary A. Parrett, A Many Colored Kingdom: Multicultural Dynamics for Spiritual Formation (Grand Rapids Michigan: Baker Academic, 2003), 180.

⁴⁵ In almost all the interviews conducted in which questions were asked, there seemed to be a clear hesitancy before the question was given an answer. Response time varies from as fast as 5 seconds to as late as after the interview has come to an end.

reluctance to respond, at times the Samoan ultimately would make up a story to satisfy the interrogator and divert their attention. A classic example is the long-standing debate on Margaret Mead's research among adolescent Samoan girls. She questioned Samoan girls on matters that are *tapu* or taboo, even among Samoans, without securing the appropriate *va*, and without appreciation of the delicate nature of the question. Had she spent time observing this characteristic of the Samoan worldview, Mead would have been suspicious of the ease with which she received answers to her inquiries.⁴⁶

When Chinese workers were brought to Samoa to cultivate the cocoa and coconut plantations during the 1940s, they were anxious to learn the native tongue. A Chinese would ask a Samoan how to say "fire" or "rain" in Samoan and the Samoan, in contemplation of the *va*, would start off with saying "aah..... ah-fee" or "ooh..... tee-mu." There is a very succinct yet subtle hesitancy before the actual word is enunciated and to the Chinese ear it sounded like every Samoan word starts with an "aah" or an "ooh." As a result, Chinese immigrants, who speak otherwise fluent Samoan, still preface their remarks with the "ooh..." this, and "aah..." that.⁴⁷ Contemplation of the *va* is so deeply imbedded in the Samoan psyche that it is only through critical reflection that one recognizes this characteristic of the Samoan worldview and mindset. Now there is a realization that perhaps we should have been more intentional when sharing our language with our Chinese brothers and sisters, but it is now this same *va* that will not allow us to correct our brothers.

⁴⁶ Mead, Coming of Age in Samoa. See also Freeman, Margaret Mead and Samoa.

⁴⁷ Rev. Feleti Ngan Woo shared this insight with us at Second Samoan Congregational Church during Sunday brunches or *toona'i* after service in 2003.

These examples illustrate the importance of the *va* and how it dictates when Samoans can and cannot exercise their right to speak; the *va* also gives guidance to how this right is exercised. In formal gatherings, before any story telling takes place, words have to be spoken that acknowledges the *va* between the listener and the speaker, whose words are ultimately directed to the divine, requesting permission and blessing to tell the story, thus maintaining the ultimate *va*.

In the Samoan cosmogony, *Tagaloa* created heaven and earth and existed in the expanse.⁴⁸ and at a place where *Tagaloa* touched the ground there grew up a *Papa*⁴⁹ or a rock. *Tagaloa* created all things and all things were made by *Tagaloa*.⁵⁰ The *Solo o le Va o le Foafoaga o le Lalolagi* is the formal narrative, which tells the story of creation in the Samoan language.⁵¹ *Va*, again in this instance, physically means the spatial distance; only this time, it refers to the ultimate distance between the creator and the creature. In the Samoan genesis story the god *Tagaloa* dwells in the tenth heaven which exists in the *va-nimo-nimo* beyond what a human can see and therefore maintains a *va* or distance from humans. *Tagaloa* created the ten heavens by speaking them into existence:

Foa le lagi!

⁴⁸ *The Expanse*; 'va-nimo-nimo' is the word used here. *Va* means space between any two things; it may be as small a space as that between two laths on a partition wall or the planking of a ship's deck; but it may include as much as the east is distant from the west; *nimonimo* means 'far, far distant.' therefore *va-nimo-nimo* means 'vastly extended space'—so vast that the mind cannot fathom it. In Samoan, *nimonimo* is said of anything that has quite passed from view; and a lark soaring aloft, and thus going out of sight, would be said to be *nimonimo*.

⁴⁹ *Papa*, 'rock;' it also means 'plain, level, flat.' To the Polynesian myth-makers, their mountains, being mostly volcanic, do not belong to the earliest stages of creation.

⁵⁰ Another version of the creation story has *Tagaloa* as a maternal progenitor of creation, which is in contrast to a much feared creator God. The maternal progenitor version is often regarded as the feminine version of the story and thus equally valid. *Tagaloa* is both male and female.

⁵¹ The title means – The Song of Contentment of the Origin of that Which Is Under the Firmament.

*Le lagi tua-tasi
Too i le teve
Tee i lagi
Mau, mau, mau i le masoa.*

Create the heavens,
the first heaven,
prop it with the *teve* (hogweed),
lift it sky high,
fasten, fasten, fasten with *masoa!* (starch)⁵²

*Foa le lagi!
Le lagi tua-lua
Too i le teve
Tee i lagi
Mau, mau, mau i le masoa.*

Create the heavens,
the second heaven,
prop it with the *teve* (hogweed),
lift it sky high,
fasten, fasten, fasten with *masoa!* (starch).

There are a total of ten heavens and the tenth heaven was created as follows:

*Foa le lagi!
Le lagi tua-sefulu
Too i le teve
Muta ai lagi
Mau, mau, mau i le masoa.*

Create the heaven,
the tenth heaven,
prop it with the *teve* (hogweed),
Last of the heavens,
fasten, fasten, fasten with *masoa!* (starch).

This creation narrative points to the fact that every time a heaven is created, immensity and space bring forth offspring, meaning that the act of creation is always accompanied

⁵² Translation by Aiono Le Tagaloa, August 2001.

by the creation of a *va* that then becomes populated with life. Every time a creation is issued a *va* or distance is put in place.

In the first heaven, immensity or *nimonimo* and space or *va*, brought forth night or *po* and day or *ao*. *Tuite 'eilagi* (one who props up the heavens) propped up the second heaven and immensity and space brought forth sky or *lagi*. *Tuite 'eilagi* propped up the third heaven and immensity and space peopled it. *Tuite 'eilagi* propped up the fourth heaven and immensity and space brought forth *Ilu* and *Mamao* to populate it. *Ilu* are basic life forms; they grow to become *Ilo* or maggots which function to sustain life. *Mamao* means far or long distance. It seems that subsequent acts of creation called for creating distance between the life forms, and each time this was done, a heaven was put in place to contain it. *Tuite 'eilagi* propped up the fifth heaven, and *Ilu* and *Mamao* would populate it. *Tuite 'eilagi* propped up the sixth heaven, and *Ilu* and *Mamao* would populate it. *Tuite 'eilagi* propped up the seventh, heaven and *Ilu* and *Mamao* would populate it. *Tuite 'eilagi* propped up the eighth heaven, and *Ilu* and *Mamao* would populate it. *Tuite 'eilagi* propped up the ninth heaven, and women or *tama 'ita 'i* would populate it. Accordingly, women play crucial roles in the Samoan family and community, because they occupy the highest heaven that humans can occupy. Each of the heavens became occupied by *Sa Tagaloa* or the family of *Tagaloa*. According to the narratives the tenth heaven is the place where the god dwells and is off limits.

After the ten heavens were created by *Tagaloa-lagi* and populated by *Sa Tagaloa*, then the narrative focused on the creation of the world or the space underneath the sky or *lalolagi*. The following is a portion of this creation story as received from the Chiefs of Manu'a, specifically the *matais* of the island of Tau:

SOLO o le VA

Le upu a Tuli, o le ata lea o Tagaloa-savali, ia Tagaloa-fa'atutupunu'u.

*Galu lolo, ma galu fatio'o
Galu tau, ma galu fetaia'i:
O le auau peau ma le sologa peau,
Na ona fa'afua ae le fati:
Peau taoto, peau ta'alolo
Peau malie, peau lagatonu
Peau alilia, peau laaia
Peau fatia, peau taulia
Peau tautala, peau lagavaa
Peau tagata, peau a sifo ma gagae
O lona soa le auautata'a⁵³*

The next portion of the Solo o le Va is the author's personal
Translation of the creation story

*O Tagaloa, dwell with us
O Tagaloa, tired am I
(Tagaloa) Tuli will rest from the sea when in heaven
Strong are the waves from below*

*Which village first came to be?
Great Manu'a came first
Is the water turning to rock?
Is the moon full of desires?
Can the Sun be an eternal riddle?*

Water grows, ocean expands, heaven reigns

*Tagaloa comes down to visit
Cries to the west, cries to the east*

Weeps for wanting a place to stand

*Savai'i and Mauga-loa rises
Fiti and Tonga rises*

⁵³ George Pratt, T. Powell and John Fraser, "Some Folk-Songs and Myths from Samoa," Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales, v.25 (1890): 195-217. See also John Fraser, "The Samoan Story of Creation – A Tala," Journal of the Polynesian Society 1 (1900): 164-89; accessed January 30, 2008, available from http://www.sacred-texts.com/pac/jpolys/ssc.htm#page_175.

*Savai'i rises but last
The isles of Tonga and the Isles of Fiji forms
As well as other smaller island groups
With their sacred space-Alamisi
Samata towards the land and Samata towards the water
The chair of Tagaloa and resting place
Manu'a it is, for you were first
Become the resting place for Tagaloa
Other islands to follow*

*Abide in your mountain ranges, sacred
Tagaloa, abide in the mountains of Manu'a,
When you dwell in your heavens
Planning and discerning
The va between the villages maintained
When the water and the wind comes
Tagaloa be sensitive to the currents
Long to heaven for small stones
Upolu, a small pebble,
Tutuila, a rock rough,
Islands of the sun lifted up
Give rest to the Ali'is
Tagaloa looks on with joy*

*Come now the peopling vine
To populate Tutuila
And Upolu, and Atua, and Aana,*

*And also Tuamasaga.
Though they are formed, but are not awake
They do not have godly attributes
Tell Tagaloa in heaven
The peopling vine has offspring
They just wiggle in the sun
But without legs. without arms
Without a head, without a face
They do not have godly attributes*

*Tagaloa comes down west
Through words embodied in flesh
Take a look at the offspring of the vine
"Create while I guide"
Your requests were received
Make their bodies dark
Their eyes bright
To receive Tagaloa*

When come down walking

*Make their bodies dark
Their eyes bright
To receive Tagaloa
When come down.⁵⁴*

In a similar fashion the creation story then shows that after the heavens were created by *Tagaloa*, one of the *Sa-Tagaloa* (issues of Tagaloa), *Tagaloa-savali*, also known as *Tuli* or *Tuli-o-Tagaloa* or the messenger, came down from heaven to survey the *lalolagi*, the world beneath the heavens. *Tagaloa-savali* noted the watery waste, the waves moving without a specific course, and *Tagaloa-savali* could not find a place to rest; in his weariness he cried out to *Tagaloa-faatupumu'u* for a place to rest. *Tagaloa* heard the messenger's prayer, reasoned, thought, and gazed upon the surface of the waters, *na feliua'i lona finagalo*, *na taula'i ona fofoga i le fogavai*, and the *papatu* or rock sprang up. To the *papatu* *Tagaloa* commanded: Divide and multiply; and Manu'a Island was created – the firstborn of the Samoan archipelago. After Manu'a, Savai'i was created, then the other islands. Reflecting upon how the story unfolds, one comes away with the notion that creation is a naturally occurring process whose function is to support life.

The narrative goes on to say that after land was created the *fue-tagata* or peopling vine and *fue-sa* or sacred vine were brought together and, according to *Tuli's* report, the vine rotted in the sunlight and brought forth young ones with no legs, arms, heads or faces, no features; they merely wiggled in the sun. Then *Tagaloa* instructed *Tuli* to imprint onto the creatures certain forms and members, and *Tuli* did as instructed but the

⁵⁴ Translated by Misipouena Tagaloa, April 9, 2008.

forms were without life. Then Tagaloa gave the forms the *fatumanava* or godly attributes, and they became *tagata-ola* or living persons both male and female. This act established the essence of perpetuation and completeness of life as that with which both male and female are charged. These are the attributes that made them different from other living species. Such attributes also distinguish human life from other life. This mirrors the crowning of the human in the Hebrew Bible genesis story of creation.

The narrative points to the *va* between the creator *Tagaloa* and the created; every time *Tagaloa* creates, a *va* is established by means of the spoken word through which the *sau o le ola*, or the breath of life, becomes manifested in the creature. As the closest approximation of what the narrative is describing, I can only think of a mother having a baby; after the baby separates from the mother the *sau o le ola*, or breath of life, is manifested in the newborn. All creatures, and all that was ever created, contain this breath of life in them. This is why the *va* is observed among and within creation between the created. The difference that *tagata-ola*, living person, makes in creation is because living persons are endowed exclusively with *fatumanava* or godly attributes. This is why *tagata-ola* is the only part of creation that is burdened with the imperative to worship – to make a spiritual connection with Tagaloa in observance of the *va* between the creator and the created. This story of creation has many similarities to the Creation story in the Hebrew Bible as well as Greek mythological stories of creation and power relationships. It is clear that the idea that God is somehow related to the created seems common among these three genesis traditions.

Genealogical Links

Va with the Cosmos: The recurring theme in the epic story of creation is the genealogical link between Tagaloa and Sa-Tagaloa or progeny of Tagaloa. We are all one big family, the gods and humanity. The connection among humankind, the animal world, the cosmos, and the environment is one of genealogy, a genealogy that is at once divine and temporal, sacred and mundane, far and yet near. The balance of this connection defines the status of peace and harmony. The maintenance of proper relations between all living creatures leads to harmony between the divine and the temporal. Harmony involves acknowledgment of the sacred relations between humans and the cosmos; to tamper with this *va* is to tamper with life itself. The *va* between the human and the cosmos must be characterized by balance and harmony. In the Samoan indigenous religion, there are ten levels of spirituality or heavens that humans aspire to. In the ninth heaven lives Amoâ, the daughter of Tagaloa, who personifies the *feagaiga* or covenants. In the tenth heaven resides Tagaloa. Humans in their quest for spiritual development can only attain the first nine heavens. To wish to reach the tenth heaven is presumptuous because the tenth heaven is where Tagaloa, the absolute, resides. To be presumptuous is to lack humility and to lack humility is to personify disharmony and conflict. The Samoan term for humility is *loto maualalo*, meaning to have mental and emotional acceptance of a lower status.⁵⁵ In Samoan indigenous religious terms, the status implied here is lower than the status of the ultimate and absolute, lower than that of Tagaloa.

⁵⁵ Our research has uncovered that *loto maualalo* is a quality that the community admires in their winners and leaders. For example, the winners of the *lauga* or the rhetorical competition at the Tafesilafa'i Festival have been those who exhibited great *to'a* or poise, the most *poto* or intelligence, with the most *loto maualalo* or humility.

Va with the Environment: In regards to the environment, the relationship necessary for peace and harmony is that of equivalence, meaning that a person's well being is equally connected to the well being of the environment and the idea of persons dominating the environment is not supported by the *fa'a-Samoa*. There are many stories which underscore this relationship between humans and plant and animal life. There are equally as many Samoan proverbs illustrating the sacred significance of this relationship. There are also many terms that underscore the continued communal bond between humans and the environment.

For example, the Samoan term *eleele* meaning earth, and *palapala* meaning mud, are also the same words for blood. Just as blood is important to the body, so is the earth important to the Samoans. *Fatu*, meaning rock, is also the word for heart. Just as the heart is important to the body, so are land or rock formations to the continuation of life in the *fa'a-Samoa*. *Fanua*, meaning placenta, is also the word for land. Just as the placenta nourishes life in its infancy, so does the land nourish life in Samoa. For Samoans these terms point to the rock or *papa* and dirt or *eleele* as the progenitors of human beings. This has a parallel in the Jewish creation story when God made humans from the earth. The linking of humans and *papa* and *eleele* is further referenced by the ritual burial of the *pute* (umbilical cord) and *fanua* (placenta) into the land or earth. There is more than mere symbolism in these rituals; there is spiritual continuity, a spiritual continuity that ensures harmony and respect for the environment. The ritual of burying the *pute* and *fanua* reminds us of the common birthing between the human female and mother earth. This ritual also invites the recognition that the environment lives, shares pain, grows, and

dies in a manner and form similar to humankind.

In the indigenous Samoan religion it was crucial, before a tree was cut, that a *fa'alanu* or a prayer chant was performed. The chant sought pardon from the god of the forest for taking the life of the tree or any of its member parts. Senator Pule Tuiasosopo tells the story of Lata and how, when the *fa'alanu* protocol was not observed, Lata labored without success in cutting down the tree for his boat.⁵⁶

Va between Humans: Humans are social, cultural, political, and spiritual beings and human life, as a collective, revolves around harmonious *va* or relationships between fellow humans. When there is difficulty in maintaining good *va*, disharmonies arise, and conflicts ensue. Conflicts occur when the *tuaoi* or boundaries between persons are transgressed or misunderstood. However, though they may arise from disharmony, conflicts are not necessarily without life-giving attributes. In a closely knit *aiga*, conflicts can be resolved into a deeper understanding and healing of all persons involved. Often in the Samoan community, disharmonies are resolved through the coming together of members in remorse and forgiveness, in the context of *alofa*, compassion and *aiga*, family. It is the commitment to maintaining good *va* that makes for the endurance of the *fa'a-Samoa*; it is the embodiment of the *fa'aSamoa* when *va* is maintained.

In the *va* between fellow humans, Samoans acknowledge the existence of a special relationship between people. As with the relationship between humans and the cosmos and as well as humans and the environment, there also exists in the relationship

⁵⁶ In the Summer of 2004, HC Pule Tuiasosopo gave an oral interpretation of the story of Lata and how he labored to carve a canoe out of a tree in the forest, retiring to the village at dusk only to return the next morning to find the tree back to its original upright and uncut position. It was not until he gave an offering to the god of the forest that the tree was finally allowed to be used to carve Lata's canoe.

between humans certain *tapu* or sacred relationships. These *tapu* are maintained by sacred covenants called *feagaiga* which also means promises. As a result of these *tapu* and *feagaiga*, boundaries emerge.

In this harmony within the *aiga*, family, there are numerous relationships of significance. An example is the relationship between parent and child. This relationship is sacred. The bond between the mother and child is both spiritual and material, for the mother nurtures her child from the point of conception, before the child has been formed in the womb, until the child is delivered into the world. The father, together with the mother, nurtures the child through life by instruction and by example. When this *va* or relationship is not properly observed, delinquency results and disharmony ensues.

Harmony between the parent and child is also a metaphor for harmony between family leaders and family members and also is reflected between the state and its citizens. Samoans recognize that the emotions and values of love and compassion begin in the microcosm of the home, in the relationship between parent and child. Harmony between parent and child breeds harmony in society. Compassion for other human beings in the macrocosm of humanity draws from the harmony between parent and child. This is why families are important to Samoans, because these ties connect each person to nurturing relationships that later impact their communal life together.

The Samoan expression *o tama a manu e fafaga i fuga o laau a'o tama a tagata e fafaga i upu ma tala* is apropos in delineating the role of the parent to the child as that of giver of life.⁵⁷ For Samoans this proverb serves as instructions to parents, whereby a

⁵⁷ The proverb translates – Offspring of animals are fed with fruits and plants, but human offspring are nurtured with words and stories. It means that words are to humans like fruits are to birds: they function to give and maintain life. When folks perceive life as about giving and maintaining life, there is a

parent says to his or her child: "there are two things to remember in life, first is the importance of love and second is the importance of balance and good judgment." The nurturing process can only be sustained by love and good judgment. You teach your children well because you love them and because it is an indication of good judgment. This saying implies that parents have a responsibility to raise and care for their children well and that children in turn can rely on their parents for proper guidance. Irresponsible childrearing causes shame to befall the parents and the entire family. The importance of the relationship between parent and child is marked by the power vested in parents to give *fa'amanuiaga*, or blessings, and, conversely, to impose *fetu'u*, or curses, on their children. Harmony between parent and child ultimately generates harmony in society.

Va between One and Self: Leaders in the Samoan community carry a great responsibility for the wellbeing of their families and the community at large. As such, their mental health is very important to the task of leading. In the *va* or harmony between one and self, it is acknowledged that humans are self-reflective beings, meaning that one can reflect upon oneself, and intelligence and wisdom transpire as much through self-reflection and personal experience as by objective analyses or peer and elder mentoring. Self-reflection through *anapogi* (fasting or meditation) and *moe manatu* (dream dialogue with God) are methods promoted by the indigenous Samoan religion for gaining perspective on the harmony between one's outer self and inner self. This was the Samoan understanding of the divine and the Samoans' collective response to the

strong sense of wholeness that falls heavy on the learner and a sense of well being sweeps over the learner, the community and the world.

maintenance of that *va*, before the missionaries converted the islands.

In the Samoan indigenous religion there are three key parts to a person or self: the *tino* or body, the *mafaufau* or mind, and the *agaga* or soul. Harmony within the self requires harmony in the body, the mind and most importantly the soul. For Samoans harmony in the body is crucial because this harmony determines how well one can engage in core survival tasks such as planting, hunting, fishing, cooking, sex, play, martial arts, and daily tasks. A harmonious body is one that exhibits physical dexterity and symmetry, and carries itself well.⁵⁸ Beauty and harmony in the body are reflected in the physical and spiritual symmetry achieved through physical exercise and dietary control.

Harmony in the mind involves finding consistent and unified messages conveyed to the mind through the senses. Sensory perceptions are communicated to the brain and made sense of by the mind. It is the function of the mind to assess sensory evidence for cognitive meaning. The purpose of the mind then is to discern evidence and make good judgments, an indication that the mind is senses-oriented, which leaves the function of the soul to handle extra-sensory perceptions.⁵⁹

The soul, which in Samoan is the *agaga* or *mauli*, resides between the *fatu* (heart) and the *mama* (lungs). The significance of this is that the heart represents God, who provides rhythm and life to the mind and body, while the lungs contain the *sau o le ola* or

⁵⁸ Losing weight is a most recent development in the developed world and it has not yet taken hold in the Samoan community. The idea of harmonious body is an indigenous and holistic view of how a body ought to be to function in the community.

⁵⁹ The Samoan saying “*o le faiva o mafaufau o le faatonutonu ma le faasoasoa*” underscores the task of the mind, which is to discern the evidence and make good judgments.

breath of life. When a chief blesses a successor, he (and in ninety nine percent of the cases a chief is male) breathes his blessing into his successor's mouth. This represents the breath of life. Moreover, when two people greet in embrace, cheek to cheek, they will breathe in through their noses the *mana* or power of the other. Samoans call this *sogi* or smell. The spiritual contents of the chief's blessing, and the breathed-in *mana* of the *sogi*, travel first to the lungs as the custodians of the breath of life, and then to other parts of the body and mind.

The question now arises: how does one feed the soul? In the Samoan indigenous religion, the soul is fed through *anapogi* (fasting, prayer, and meditation) and *moe manatu* (dream dialogue with the divine). *Moe* means sleep, and *tofa* is the term given to the sleep of the Chief. *Tofa* and *moe* also refer to the views of the chiefs and orators respectively, and such views are informed by their *moe manatu*. Through *moe manatu* the gods and ancestors are able to assist the chief and orator not only in decisions concerning the self but also in decisions relating to family and to community.

Through both the *moe manatu* and the *anapogi*, the soul is fed. Both invite self-reflection and re-assessment, not only of the contexts of today, but of yesterday and of tomorrow. Spiritual insight assists in the achievement of mental and physical harmony. Through the harmonies of body, mind, and soul, the self searches for and achieves, levels of spiritual harmony or personal peace. In the search for peace, the harmonies between humanity and the cosmos, humanity, and the environment, humans and humans, and with each human are, about human being's continual search for ultimate harmony. It is the search rather than the finding of these harmonies that gives emphasis, purpose, and

meaning to the self and to life.⁶⁰

Political Infrastructures

Malae–Open Space: At the center of every Samoan village is the *malae* or village square. *Malae* provides community open space used for settlements and meetings, as well as other cultural events. *Ma* in this context means a collection of opinions, statements, or expressions. It refers to the wisdom or knowledge often imparted during these gatherings. *Lae* means a body of many parts; in this context it refers to the body of land where many opinions, statements, or expressions of wisdom are exchanged. Legend has it that one of Tagaloa's favorite *malae* is Malaetele in the island of Tau in the Manu'a group. Tagaloa would come down to the *malae* to dialogue with Sa-Tagaloa, relatives of Tagaloa, imparting wisdom and knowledge. Every village has a *malae*, used exclusively for communal events such as meetings, *ava* ceremonies, welcoming visitors, title bestowment, and even entertainment. Similar to *fa'alupega* for each village, the village *malae* is equally endowed with a narrative as to the origin of its name. When a Chief wishes to render a proclamation, it is not proclaimed in a house, but out in the *malae*. During funerals the name of the *malae* is invoked before the *fa'alupega*, the salutation, is recited, pointing to the significance of the *malae* and its position in the *fa'a-Samoa*.

The *malae* is to the village council, what the *faalupega* is to the chiefs. Each village has different rules for keeping the *malae* sacred and maintained. There are rules.

⁶⁰ This knowledge is pieced together from many conversations with different elders in the Samoan community in different contexts. Much of this knowledge is preserved communally and specifically in various proverbs that serve as markers along the road to coming to know as a Samoan. Aiga Tagaloa, my mother assists in concretizing some of this knowledge by sharing with us stories from our family's history that support this knowledge. The translation in English is my feeble attempt at voicing reality as Samoans know it.

such as: you cannot walk through the *malae* unless the village is using it; you have to lay down your burden when crossing in front of the *malae*; you cannot cross the center of the *malae*; you cannot eat and drink in the *malae*. Keeping the *malae* clean is the responsibility of the entire village. Each family is given a section of the *malae* to clean. In some villages, the *pulenu'u* or mayor is responsible for maintaining the *malae*. Today, population growth, economic pressures, and changing cultural values are threatening the *malae*, and in diaspora the non-existence of a physical *malae* or open space leaves many desirable cultural activities unobserved. In Samoa, more and more houses are being built on the *malae* today. Public utility right of ways, public roads, basketball courts, and personal residences are being built on *malaes*, threatening the survival of these open spaces. Why are *malaes* becoming smaller? According to High Chief Faiivae Galeai, the *matais*, for economic reasons, are allowing the *malae* to be used to generate revenue to sustain the families. The younger generation has lost the idea of the use of the *malae* other than for entertainment or as a playing field.⁶¹

In the diaspora, it is clear that some attributes of the *fa'a-Samoa* continue to exist without a *malae*; however, the contribution to the political infrastructure that the *malae* represented, an open space where wisdom is imparted to the community, is now missing; there is a need for that political infrastructure to be contextualized in the western construct to have it make sense to the Samoan youth of today. Though what is missing is the physicality of a space where wisdom is shared in the open to be seen, tested, and

⁶¹ Information concerning *malae* is from first hand experiential knowledge, personal communication over the years with Senator Faiivae Galea'i. HC Pule Tuiasosopo, HC Oloatua Apineru & HC Muliaumaseali'i Ripine Allen, my parents, and other elders in my family. Some of the materials are captured in a DVD titled *Malae: Sacred Grounds* produced and distributed by American Samoa Community College Samoa Pacific Studies Department.

critiqued, the safety of smaller groups in a classroom or a pulpit is perhaps the closest to a *malae* that we can have. There is also an element that is amiss, and that is the absence of a space which is both common and sacred, and commonly maintained; this distinction is now lost to the newer generations. Will the *malae* have the same fate as the Samoan *fale* or house?⁶² For the *matai*, the *malae* is the body and soul of the village. To the *tulafale* or orators, without the *malae* the village can not function, maintain its vitality or even exist.

Challenges to Survival in the Borderland

The borderland is described as a new and different urban community, emerging in Southern California as part of an increasingly globalized world, a community where people of different backgrounds work, live, and interact. Throughout the course of this research, this urban community has morphed into a pluralistic, multiracial, multicultural place, with ensuing significant changes in identity and values. The inhabitants who find their way into the borderland come from around the world and with them bring their preferences: food, clothing, language, and value systems. At the same time, there is a sense of vitality that comes from the freedom of expression.

Se'i Sau Malama – The Illusion of Someday:

⁶² Very few Samoan *fales* or houses are being built in Samoa today. Of the families that we have interviewed, nine out of ten have expressed a wish to have a *fale-palagi* or western style house. In fact it is a sign of success when a family manages to build a *fale-palagi*. In the *diaspora*, because of strict building codes, the *fale-Samoa* has not gone through the rigorous planning and building for one to be built in California.

One of the challenges that my research has uncovered in the borderland is the notion of temporality or “someday.” I have called it *se’i sau malama* which translates as “till next light.”⁶³ This notion of putting things off runs deeper than mere procrastination and has derailed many of our social programs in the community. It has thwarted many well-meaning campaigns for social justice, delayed many right actions, and rendered a community immobile to possibilities in the diaspora, to such an extent that “se’i sau malama” begs to be examined.

If someone were to say to us, “X is possible,” we would normally understand them to mean that X does not now exist, and that its future existence may occur but is not certain. This is the ordinary use of the term possibility; however, the expression “*se’i sau malama*” which also means possibility in Samoan, adds a temporal nature to the idea of possibility. Imagine being told that “X is possible;” in the Samoan worldview the natural response to that proclamation is, “of course X is possible,” given enough time, X is possible. And if X is in the future, then “of course X is possible now.” This built-in nature of possibility is visibly absent from just “X is possible,” which requires personal effort to bring X about. In the Samoan expression “*se’i sau malama*,” we are speaking about both something remote and an event that may happen in the future. We potentially are looking at an immediate and powerful impact to our lives both in the now -- the present, at close range -- and in the future, yet to be. “Till next light” or *se’i sau malama* can occur in the blink of an eye, or it can be a hundred light years from now. It does not

⁶³ “Se’i sau malama” means until tomorrow or until next time or until we meet again. *Malama* translates literally to light – thus the term “till next light.” This expression is used in formal settings which connotes possibility and what’s-next-ness. It functions to leave one with a sense of hope, a sense that there is always a tomorrow and that there is always possibility. Over the years it has also served as an excuse for procrastination.

have to be tomorrow or the next day or someday; it can be the next time I blink my eye. As an example, two years ago a youth group from Carson participated in the Tafesilafa'i conversation for the very first time after receiving the invitation for seven years straight. Their response had always been "*se'i sau malama*" or "someday," and when they finally participated it was the most life giving experience for the youth as well as their community.

Our research invariably brought up the question "How long have you been in the United States?" and responses ranged from five to thirty five years. When asked further why they have not participated in the socio-economic-political mechanism of the United States, their response is some version of "*se'i sau malama*" or they are waiting to go home, with home meaning somewhere other than here.⁶⁴ When asked why they have not purchased a home yet, or registered to vote yet, the answer is some variation of "*se'i sau malama*." Thirty five years later, they are still renting an apartment, "waiting to go home," "till next light." While "*se'i sau malama*" makes a great eschatological statement, it does not lend itself well to social and economic justice conversations. This is part of the context that we encountered during the research. If we can distinguish for the youth that "*se'i sau malama*" can be thirty five years or it can also mean immediately, we can begin to cause transformation in our communities. When the illusion of someday is distinguished and made conscious to the community, a new view of possibility which has an immediate and powerful impact on who we are, how we live our lives, and how we see things – now, in the present – is discerned. With this new possibility, we have the

⁶⁴ Participatory Action Research done with twelve Samoan families in the Long Beach, South Bay area in 2002-2003 revealed that most of the adults have this notion that their time in the United States is only temporary and that they will someday go back to Samoa either to retire or to live permanently.

power to move, to touch, and to inspire others and ourselves, to shape our actions and to shift the way we are being right now. Instead of letting go of the “*se’i sau malamalama*” and “waiting to go home,” each is offered yet another way of looking at the world that may be as valid as the one they now have. It is similar to constructed knowledge where the different messages and voices are integrated into the totality of a knower such that: “all knowledge is constructed and the knower is an intimate part of the known.”⁶⁵

Summary: This chapter describes the context in which the research activity took place, which included reflection on communal practices, identification of communal knowledge sources, the role that learners and parent-teachers play in creating and sharing knowledge, and the explicitness of the knowledge creating inquiry. In doing this, social, religious, and political infrastructures were distinguished in the Samoan community both in Samoa and in the diaspora. Because these structures impede, inform, and enhance education, time was spent distinguishing them as very integral parts of the *fa’a-Samoa* and as such can be effective dispensers of knowledge. The last portion of the chapter discusses the challenges that Samoans have to address in order to survive in the borderland and how the epistemological infrastructures discerned previously can complicate the task of education, transformation and influence.

This leads us to the next chapter which addresses the question: How do Samoans Come to Know? It takes the context of this research thus far, and juxtaposes that context unto a Whiteheadian epistemology and a process theology. The next chapter presents an overlay of process thought onto the grounded research data that we have accumulated.

⁶⁵ Belenky, et al., Women’s Ways of Knowing, 137.

CHAPTER 4

How Samoans Come to Know

Science conceived as resting on mere sense perception,
with no other source of observation, is bankrupt¹
Alfred North Whitehead, Modes of Thought

In this chapter Whiteheadian thought and process theology are placed in dialogue with first hand experiences, field notes, and descriptive reflections about how Samoans come to know. Whiteheadian thought is mapped onto the grounded research, while similarities, differences, and things-that-do-not fit are noted. As the title of the chapter implies, this is an attempt to answer the question, How do persons come to know. Using the language of process thought and process theology, I endeavor to explain a particular epistemology that is grounded in the work of Alfred North Whitehead. The second part of this chapter attempts to answer the question, How do Samoans learn and what is the relationship between process thought and Samoan epistemology? Samoan communities are structured in natural and distinct manners. This means that they are structured distinctly and gifted with their own cosmogony, language, and culture. Furthermore, a specific epistemology that is drawn out from this natural structure is necessary in constructing a pedagogy that is unique, effective and life giving to the Samoan community in the diaspora. The final part of this chapter is a discussion of some of my

¹ David Ray Griffin, Reenchantment without Supernaturalism: A Process Philosophy of Religion (Ithaca Cornell University Press, 2001), 54.

goals and aspirations for how one can utilize a Samoan epistemology to implement some of those goals in the world.

How Do Persons Learn?

How do persons learn? Answers to this question from the standard neoclassical framework are based on a worldview consisting of a closed universal system of laws and mechanisms, populated by atomistic agents, and of a shape and quality which historically has been closed to opposing views. The process worldview, on the other hand, interprets the world as open, interrelated, communal, and flexible--a world in which the perspectives chosen and the actions taken are respected, acknowledged, and paid attention to in some fundamental way. Instead of a system populated by atomistic agents, the process worldview consists of “flashes” of events in space and time, with each event making sense of itself only when in relation with other events. This worldview pragmatically works itself out in the Samoan context as the concept of the *va*. From this worldview emerges an epistemology that is relational and generative, embodying openness and emancipatory impulses which lead to a pedagogy that holds reason in tension with emotion, abstraction in tension with particularity, and precision in tension with that which can only be nebulously known.

In other words, maintaining the *va* calls us to a way of being that allows the expansion of our universe of knowledge to include an inquiry into what we don't know that we don't know, using investigatory practices that are not bound by allegiance to formal, widely accepted modeling. So in the *fa'a-Samoa* worldview, we say that persons learn through events in which they participate and which are necessary for survival; furthermore knowledge is seen as arbitrary, provisional, contextual and fallible, rather

than eternal, universal, and certain. For example, when Samoans immigrated to the United States, the skills that embodied survival in the Islands and the worldview that seemed eternal, universal, and certain in the middle of the Pacific Ocean were no longer appropriate or even necessary for survival in the diaspora. The way of being that did survive the trip is captured in the concept of the *va* and is a notion that continues to mobilize the community in the diaspora. But Samoans did not just discard the old and run with the new; our research has shown that Samoans in diaspora acquire the new but do not disregard the old.

According to Alfred North Whitehead, and I may be faulted for oversimplification, all creatures learn in three ways: through the senses (presentational immediacy),² from the past (causal efficacy)³ and through symbolic reference (symbolism).⁴ In other words, a child gathers information through the senses and comes to know through those sensory experiences in the immediate past and the present. As she collects these sensory perceptions, she compares them to previous experiences and enjoys the interaction between the experiences in the past that cause or have an effect on present experiences, thus expanding her universe of experiences, knowledge, and reality. In addition, the child begins to systemically and creatively refer to symbols, as abstract representations of concepts or objects, and thus adds those experiences to her universe. These symbolic references form the third way in which humans come to know. Language, written or spoken, is an example of such symbolism. In language, words are

² Alfred North Whitehead, Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect (New York: Macmillian Publishing Company; Cambridge, MA: University Press, 1985), 13.

³ Ibid., 30-49

⁴ Ibid., 60-88.

symbols and their meanings or what they represent are the ideas, images, and emotions which the words raise in the mind of the hearers.⁵ Said another way, symbolism is the applied use of any iconic representation which carries a particular and more or less agreed-upon meaning. In ordinary language, the meaning of the symbol is received, remembered, and reproduced in the hearer every time the symbol is encountered, though the same meaning may not be discerned each time the symbol is received. So consistent memory, mediated through customs, culture, and rituals, is important to ensure the smooth transference of knowledge to others. How accurate is this transmission? We will examine this question later in an application of this theory to preserving Samoan culture in the diaspora. Suffice it to say that it is only through symbolic reference that error is introduced, and thus accurate transmission may not be achievable. The two pure modes of perception, presentational immediacy and causal efficacy, consist of direct recognition which cannot be mistaken; presentational immediacy because the sense data are what they are, and causal efficacy because it is a way of perceiving directly mostly unconsciously information from the past.⁶ Error is introduced through the interplay of these two modes of perception in symbolic reference, as explained in the example below.

Whitehead spoke about a purely written language - for example, that which is constituted by mathematical symbols of algebra. In the algebraic language, the symbols are different from those of ordinary language in that their meanings are built into how they are manipulated or in relation to other symbols in the equation. So there is little need to retain the meaning of each symbol as it changes constantly, and furthermore, the

⁵ Ibid., 2.

⁶ Ibid., 40.

meaning of each symbol may fluctuate depending on the context in which it is found. In this case, the burden of meaning making, in purely written language, is found mediated in the algebraic rules and conventions.⁷ In the Samoan universe, there is a pronounced absence of a purely written language. However, to the extent that spoken words embody truths and are more or less fixed, then their meaning becomes inherent, and there is no need to retain the meaning of each symbol, as their meaning will now be mediated communally through rules of maintaining proper *va*. In both cases, language and algebra, because they tend to outlive generations of Samoans, exemplify more enduring types of symbolism than the relatively temporary symbolism of cathedrals and monumental structures, which can be demolished after their usefulness has passed. Language and algebra also are fundamental due to their resilience to interpretation, reinterpretation, or misinterpretation. Similarly, Samoan proverbs exemplify a more fundamental symbolism of the *fa'a-Samoa* than their attire, accessories, or head gear, because the proverbs survive the *disapora*, and the attire is contextualized and subjected to change.

Another kind of symbolism, even more fundamental than those mentioned above, is how we perceive colored shapes. When we look at a shoe we say – “that’s a shoe.” But in essence what we see in front of us is a mere colored object whose contours represent that of a kind of footwear. To the “untrained” person, meaning someone who is not an artist and spends little time cogitating upon the essence of colored images, that person would “pass straight from the perception of the colored shape to the enjoyment [of the shoe], in some way of use, or of emotion or of thought.”⁸ Said another way, it is

⁷ Ibid., 2.

natural, and the perceiver need not be trained to perceive a colored shape and have it mean that which the shape can be used for. In our example, we tend to look at the image of a shoe and, based on its perceived functionality, immediately enjoy it for what it can do for us. It keeps us warm during the winter, or it decorates our feet. In fact, this collapsing of what we take in through our senses and what it can be used for is the most natural and widespread application of symbolic reference; it is often referred to inaccurately as direct knowledge.

According to Whitehead, the major difference between symbolism and direct knowledge is that direct knowledge or experience is infallible. What you have experienced, is what you have experienced. With symbolism, the symbols may trigger actions, feelings, emotions, and beliefs about things which are just “ideas without exemplification in the world, in which the symbol leads us to presuppose.”⁹ In other words, symbolism is an approximation, more or less, of actual experience, and thus errors or discontinuity can and do occur in symbolism. This may be ample reason to discard symbolism as a mode of perception, but Whitehead argues quite convincingly, that symbolism is an essential factor in the way we function as the result of our direct knowledge. Whitehead seems to suggest that knowledge is maintained and improved upon because of our ability to store some of our essential direct experiences in the symbolic mechanisms of our communities. To perpetuate a community, members transfer meanings, emotions, and feelings from direct experiences to the next generation via symbolic references. Symbolic reference, in this case, is where knowledge of a community is preserved and transmitted in such a way that future generations get it to the

⁹ Ibid., 3.

extent that knowledge can be reconstructed. It is for this reason that Samoan proverbs and sayings are integral to the Tafesilafa'i conversation. The proverbs and sayings are symbolic references. Symbolic reference, in this case, is where knowledge of a community is preserved and transmitted in such a way that future generations get it to the extent that knowledge can be reconstructed. It is for this reason that Samoan proverbs and sayings are integral to the Tafesilafa'i conversation. The proverbs and sayings are symbolic references of the *fa'a-Samoa*; they embody Samoan truths, communal knowledge, and cultural values; they are subject of endless debates and interpretation and when unpacked in the diaspora, the process generates meanings, emotions, and feelings connecting the Samoans in the diaspora to their mother land.

For Whitehead, a most fundamental exemplification of symbolism is that of the poet and her poetry. A poet who wishes to write lyrics about trees will put herself in the forest in order that the trees may inspire in her the appropriate words. So the poet sees the trees as symbols and her words as their meanings. She focuses on the trees in order to get at the words, the emotions, the feelings, and the meanings. For the reader, on the other hand, who is not in the forest, the poet's words refer symbolically to the actual trees, their sounds, the feelings, the meanings, and the emotions the poet wishes to evoke. And for the reader who is in the forest reading poetry, the interactions may lead to *filemu*¹⁰ or peace in the Samoan context. So in language, there is a double symbolic reference – from things to words on the part of the speaker and from words back to things

⁹ Ibid., 6.

¹⁰ Governor Tauese Sunia spoke about *filemu* or peace as a central Samoan cultural value, and how a Samoan would crawl on his stomach in humility to avoid a confrontation. See "Tafesilafa'i Highlights" It contains Governor Sunia's remarks delivered at the 1999 Tafesilafa'i Festival in Long Beach, California.

on the part of the listener. Symbolic reference then means that there is transitional activity between the symbol and its meaning.¹¹ This concept is called *soalaupule* in Samoan. It literally means “assisting the one who is leading” and you can only assist when you have established proper *va* between the leader and the assistant. The template *soalaupule* when used in this context connotes the malleable nature of symbols and their meanings in the Samoan worldview. Whitehead goes on to argue that there is a blurring or interchangeability of the actual and the meaning, to a person without training, and the blurring is often received as actual experience. How then do persons learn? They perceive through the synthesis of the two primitive modes of perceptions, causal efficacy and presentational immediacy. It is a form of “perception in the mode of symbolic reference,” because data from one of the two former modes (usually presentational immediacy) are used to interpret data arising from the other mode (usually causal efficacy). To continue the shoe example begun above, I use the colored shape that is immediately present to my mind to interpret the feeling of causal efficacy from my body, particularly my eyes. I say, accordingly, that I am seeing a shoe. I may be wrong about that because of the existence of the interpretation. I cannot be wrong about experiencing the colored shape, and I cannot be wrong about feeling the causal efficacy. In those two pure modes of perception, there is simple givenness. But perception in the mode of symbolic reference introduces interpretation and thereby the possibility of error.¹² Good examples are the proverbs used in the Tafesilafa’i conversations. Each is a truncated truth that is subjected to much interpretation and reinterpretation, resulting in the actual

¹¹ Whitehead, Symbolism 8.

symbol and the meaning of the symbols being fused together, such that both meaning and the actual events are seen as one.

It is clear that Whitehead's philosophy is intrinsically open and ethically rich, and his formulation of a vital, interconnected, and purposeful universe includes a careful discussion of questions involving ontology, epistemology, and realism that can offer some insights into our basic question: how do persons come to know? Whitehead sees in most modern philosophers and scientists an allegiance to a substance-and-attribute ontology, in which "stuff" or "bits of matter" are the fundamental ontological units.¹³ These substances are thought of as fundamentally separate, unrelated, and distinct—as chairs, for example, or as persons, each distinguishable from the other--and considered to endure through time, though with changes to their attributes, such as location or colors, but never any changes to their substance. Whenever the question of knowledge is posed as being about how our minds can know about other substances, one can see that such a notion of reality, that substances are fundamentally separate, has already been assumed. Such a framing of the question presupposes that the "stuff" of a knower is distinct and unrelated from that of the known.

Whitehead's ontology, in contrast, is fundamentally process-oriented, energetic, and interconnected. He referred to his own views as a "philosophy of organism," pointing to his understanding of the fluid nature of individuals of which the world is composed. One stream of philosophical ideas that Whitehead espoused and the

¹² Alfred North Whitehead, Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology. Connected ed.; edited by David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne, (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 168, 172.

¹³ Donald W. Sherburne, ed., A Key to Whitehead's Process and Reality (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981) 128-29. See also Alfred North Whitehead, Modes of Thought (New York: Free Press, 1968), 128.

theological movement that that stream created, are now collectively called "process theology" simply because the term "process theology" does point to a chief feature of the movement and has become an established usage.¹⁴ There are now such tributaries of the process river such as process Whiteheadian non-theists and atheists. Whitehead's fundamental unit of reality, the "actual entity"¹⁵ is a "[drop] of experience, complex and interdependent"¹⁶ or a "throb of experience."¹⁷ The actual entity is "a process, and is not describable in terms of the morphology of 'stuff'."¹⁸ In this ontology, reality is a deeply interconnected whole; each entity "feels" all other preexisting actual entities in what Whitehead terms "concrescence," which is the process of receiving past prehensions, integrating the present using one's own freedom and contributing to the future. Then these data are synthesized into "the unity of an emotional pattern expressive of its own subjectivity."¹⁹ In the present moment, the entity is actualized through its own subjective experience and then becomes the objective data for the entities of the next moment, in an ongoing process. At any given moment, an entity, God included, is affected by previous events and as such can and does affect the next set of events. A person, for example, in this view does not first exist and then have experiences and relationships, as would be the case in a substance-and-attribute ontology, but a person would have existence and experiences simultaneously forming and reforming one another in an ongoing process. In

¹⁴ John B. Cobb, Jr. & David Ray Griffin, Process Theology: An Introduction Exposition (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 8.

¹⁵ Sherburne, A Key to Whitehead's Process and Reality, 205.

¹⁶ Cobb and Griffin, Process Theology, 7.

¹⁷ Ibid., 8.

¹⁸ Ibid., 8.

this processive view, a person is constituted in and by experience and relationships, as sequences of prehensions and syntheses and that person, composed of many ongoing events, is constantly becoming and becoming and becoming.

For Whitehead, these processes are not merely confined to conscious selves, but rather they describe reality from the simplest quark to the most complex living organism. By emphasizing experience, including human bodily experience, as the fundamental unifying reality, Whitehead essentially removes the mind-vs.-matter conundrum, suggesting an interrelatedness and collapse-ability of experiences. In short, mind and matter are interrelated and consist entirely of actual complexes of events in the process of becoming. Conscious experience, then, is not to be seen as something apart from matter, but rather an outgrowth, at a very high level of complexity, of a reality of experience that goes all the way down to the basic processes. The emphasis on energy and interconnection, rather than matter and mechanics in Whitehead's ontological scheme is, as he himself points out, consistent with developments in post-Newtonian physics and, may I hazard to suggest, post-modern epistemology as well.

Perception via Causal Efficacy: In Whitehead's analysis, sensory perception is derived from two simpler modes of perception. The more fundamental is called "perception in the mode of causal efficacy." Perception in this mode is simply physical prehension described in the language of perception. We know most of the things that we presuppose in practice via this mode. David Griffin refers to some of the knowledge perceived via

¹⁹ Ibid., 8.

causal efficacy as “hard-core commonsense notions.”²⁰ Through this more basic mode of perception, we can locate the category “other actualities besides myself” and know that there is an external world beyond our own experience, because we directlyprehend these things. As Whitehead puts it: “Common sense is inflexibly objectivist. We perceive other things, which are in the world of actualities in the same sense as we are. Also our emotions are directed towards other things, including of course our bodily organs.”²¹

Whitehead, in describing causal efficacy, suggests that each actual entity emerges through a process of conformation to the settled data of its immediate past. Hence causal efficacy is the conditioning of the present by the past, each moment making a causal connection with the past, not in virtue of the activity of the cause but through the activity of the effect. At any particular instant in time, the cause cannot be active, because at any crucial point in time, the activity of the cause is over and done with. What is active is not the past, but the present actuality, which is in the process of becoming; it is the presentational power of the past. During the Tafesilafa'i festival, much of the energy that gets generated during the events comes from perception in causal efficacy. Young people unconsciously feel the urge get up and dance the dances of their ancestors. They have seen it done elsewhere, they now see others getting involved and with little training the young people naturally position their bodies in communal activities. To see a person in terms of size, shape, smell, and sound uses the mode favored by Hume (presentational immediacy); to recognize in that person a being like oneself, a companion with feelings.

²⁰ David Ray Griffin, “Matter, Consciousness and the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness.” 31, August 2007. [online]; accessed January 15, 2008; available from <http://www.anthonvflood.com/griffinmatterconsciousness02C.htm> August 31, 2007.

²¹ Whitehead, Process and Reality, 158.

and a warm organism, uses perception via the mode of causal efficacy, a much more basic and fundamental mode of perception. Whitehead calls his position *provisional realism*.²² That is, because of the integral presence of actual entities in other entities, we perceive via causal efficacy that "other things...are in the world of actualities in the same sense as we are."²³ To say it another way: while we can admit to knowledge only that which we know from experience, because reality interpenetrates and because our experience includes broad, vague feelings of influence, enjoyment, and efficaciousness, we are confident that items and relations outside us exist.

Whitehead "accepts Hume's doctrine that nothing is to be received into the philosophical scheme which is not discoverable as an element in subjective experience."²⁴ There is a difference, however, between Hume's and Whitehead's notion of what "experience" consists. Whitehead, according to Robert Mesle, stretches experience to include simple life forms, as well as nonliving complexes such as electrons and their relationships with quarks and other subatomic events around them.²⁵ Hume does not acknowledge perception via "causal efficacy." Perception via causal efficacy according to Mesle is "...vague, not to be controlled, heavy with emotion; it produces the sense of derivation from an immediate past, and of passage to an immediate future; a sense of emotional feeling, belonging to oneself in the past, passing into oneself in the

²² Alfred North Whitehead, Science and the Modern World, (New York: Free Press, 1997, 1925), 91.

²³ Sherburne, A Key to Whitehead's Process and Reality, 136.

²⁴ Sherburne, A Key to Whitehead's Process and Reality, 137. See also Whitehead, Process and Reality, corrected ed., (New York: Free Press, 1929), 166. See also Griffin, Reenchantment without Supernaturalism, 55-56.

present, and passing from oneself in the present towards oneself in the future; a sense of influx of influence...This is our general sense of existence, as one item among others, in an efficacious actual world.”²⁶ The oratorical presentations during Tafsilafa’i draws from knowledge perceived via causal efficacy. Without this knowledge from the past, the *fa’a-Samoa* would not know how to move forward.

Perception via Presentational Immediacy: Whitehead calls the second pure mode of perception "perception via presentational immediacy." By this he means the mode in which the percepta "are distinct, definite, controllable, apt to immediate enjoyment, and with the minimum of reference to the past, or to the future."²⁷ Whitehead asserts that Hume is using this mode of perception as “the primary fact of perception, and any apprehension of causation is, somehow or other, to be elicited from this primary fact.”²⁸ and, as such, discussions that include “perception via causal efficacy” do not enter the picture. Presentational immediate data are present all around the participants during and in preparation for the Festival. These presentational data bombard them continuously and come in the form of instructions, experiences with peers, interactions with teachers and interaction with “epistemological infrastructures” in the community.

If all we know are sense data, or atomistic events, along with observations of the "repetition of associated presentational experiences"²⁹ then we do not fully know. For

²⁵ C. Robert Mesle, Process Theology: A Basic Introduction (St. Louise MO: Chalice Press, 1993), 54.

²⁶ Ibid., 118.

²⁷ Ibid., 188.

²⁸ Ibid., 121.

Whitehead, persons come to know through perceptive experience, in presentational immediacy, and via causal efficacy; causal efficacy being the more basic and fundamental mode of perception. For Whitehead, persons also come to know through conceptual analysis of experience, which is the synthesis of the two pure modes of perception. The synthesis of these two modes introduces into human experience components that are analyzable into things and into abstract attributes and relations; Whitehead refers to this as perception through symbolic reference.

Suppose one examines a five-pronged object. To note the distinct aspects of color, size, shape, length, contour, and texture is to perceive the object in the mode of “presentational immediacy.” To perceive consciously the five-pronged object as one’s hand, and that it existed in the past and has blessed others in the past, is to perceive in the mode of “causal efficacy.” Whitehead, in describing presentational immediacy is trying to capture that phase of sensing experience, which intervenes between the stimulation of the senses and perception-based reports about the environment. It is similar to the experience of seeing a collection of flowers reflected in a mirror and a corresponding collection through an open window frame.

I have often asked myself, “what is a local pastor doing contemplating these seemingly esoteric issues?” With real-life issues pressing, the disadvantaged begging to be attended to, and the not-so-real issues presenting themselves as sunny escapes from reality, I have asked, “why bother with such philosophical musings?” I’m comforted by the fact that while excessive philosophizing in obscure jargon may indeed be detrimental to the day-to-day responses to social needs, one’s thinking and behavior is in fact deeply rooted in one’s ontological beliefs and, in the case of education, rooted in one’s

²⁹ Ibid., 122

epistemological assumptions as well. These beliefs and assumptions usually are unconsciously held, in the form of vague and perhaps conflicting metaphysical impressions about how the world works, and these beliefs do have an impact on real-life pressing issues. Time spent in philosophical musings has translated to devotional disciplines in the parish, which directly impact decisions at the basic levels of pastoral ministry. One thing is sure: process theologians are in agreement that reality is relational³⁰ and that God is love.³¹ And our common experience is littered with examples that tell us that we are all affected by others and our lives are a result of relating to others, especially those with whom we exhibit feelings of love, affinity and connection. Since a complex relationship between God, the world, and creativity is pre-supposed in process theology, and learning is an attribute of relating to one another, creatures also learn in relation with one another and our lives are enhanced and acknowledged when connected to others.

How then do creatures learn? Creatures learn in three ways: through presentational immediacy, through causal efficacy, and through symbolic references. The next portion of this chapter takes these three ways of leaning and compares them to the *faa-Samoa* or the Samoan worldview.

How Samoans Come to Know

³⁰ Mesle, *Process Theology*, 25.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

Samoan Cosmogony: To begin to wrap our minds around how Samoans learn, it is necessary to examine again the Samoan creation story. From the Greek *kosmos*, “the universe,” cosmogony is the term applied to the origin and development of the universe. A cosmogony is any theory of how the universe came into being or an origin belief about how reality came to be. In many cosmogonies the universe and life were created by a supernatural being. In the Babylonian cosmogony, for example, the god Bel created the sun, stars, earth, and man from a formless chaos. The early Greek cosmogony assigned a similar creative role to the god Uranus, the son of Chaos and husband of Earth. The Samoan cosmogony, very similar to other creation stories, assigned the creative role to a god called Tagaloa.

The story of how Samoa came to be begins to deal with “what is so.” It begins to frame the “given” or that which we did not have a say. Understanding the story and locating oneself in the midst of the story serves as a starting point for understanding how Samoans come to know as portrayed in the Samoan culture. The narrative informs everything that exists, as well as the nature of existence itself. This worldview underscores the Samoan sense of existence and how Samoans make meaning of the world.

What is the Samoan cosmogony? In its simplest rendition: there is a God that created the heaven and earth, and I am an issue of that God, connected to that God, and “heir to the throne.”³² This means that every person has a fundamental relationship that connects him or her to all that was, is, and can be. When in diaspora, or in a dilemma, this worldview has kept Samoans together as a people, given them hope, and sustained

them through trials and tribulations. This story interprets the world around them and allows them to comprehend reality; this story also invites them to act accordingly. Social scientists have put forward migratory theories that suggest the origin of Samoans from other Euro-centric parts of the globe, but part of the ontological and belief system that is necessary for knowledge to be discerned, maintained, and passed on in the Samoan community, comes from the notion that Samoans were created by Tagaloa on Samoan soil.

The Samoan cosmogony delineates a relationship between the Creator and the creature and the *va* or space between them as *tapu*, *sa*, sacred or holy. It is the characteristic of this *va* that undergirds the basis of reality for Samoans. When situations being interpreted are uninformed by this reality, they are meaningless and without consequence, but when located in the context of the *va* or sacred space, events take on powerful meaning, and reality comes into being. Every entity in the physical world has a specific nature and the nature of a Samoan is to ponder the *va*, cogitate the sacred, understand relationships, and act according to that nature. From this worldview it is clear that meaningful knowledge, for Samoans, must be so constructed--thoughtful of relationships, framed in the spiritual and administered in safe, close, and cozy relationships. Knowledge constructed outside this context will be deemed suspect and received with much reservation, if at all. A good example of knowledge constructed outside the community is when a group of educators came from Samoa to conduct cultural workshops at a college in the States. The churches were not notified and the

³² "Heir to the throne" is a recent development and addition to the indigenous Samoan understanding of God, as Christianity is fused together with Samoan indigenous religious understanding.

college relied solely on public media for the dissemination of information, and because the churches were not notified, the workshops were sparsely attended.

Coming to Know: In the language of Whitehead and process thought, Samoans learn through presentational immediacy, causal efficacy, and symbolic reference. In presentational immediacy, experiences are received, recorded, and sensed as vivid and immediate. A child born into a Samoan *aiga*, family, will gain access to knowledge of the Samoan community through the mode of presentational immediacy – what they see, hear, touch, taste, and smell – sensory perception. Perceptions in this mode, at least for the newborn at this stage, have neither causal past nor affected future, meaning that the experiences occur purely as events on a continuum. These experiences occur at point blank, with minimal immediate and inter-active qualities about them. In addition, these perceptions have relatively little efficacious force on each other and cannot be much more than vividly discriminated one from another. At this stage in a child's development, sensory-based experiences appear to dominate the totality of experiences and reality for the child, and the child interacts with them with panache, enjoyment and catharsis. This interaction does not negate the fact that every infant is profoundly influenced by the past, as the past provides information via the mode of causal efficacy.

In learning Samoan dance, young persons discipline themselves to learn the meaning of each motion of the hands, eyes, and every contortion of the body in the mode of presentational immediacy as well as the mode of causal efficacy. Whitehead does not equate total consciousness with perceptions in the mode of presentational immediacy, "is our immediate perception of the contemporary external world, appearing as an element

constitutive of our own experience.”³³ Presentational immediacy constitutes a highly sophisticated and genetically late phase of the actual occasion’s concrescence; presentational immediacy is just a part of one’s overall consciousness, but not one’s entire consciousness. To deepen and enhance one’s consciousness of the dance, the student perceives the dance in the mode of symbolic reference incorporating the dance’s meaning and energy from the traditional and unconscious past as well as significance for the future.

In the realm of Tafesilafa’i,³⁴ much of what gets put up on the day of the festival occurs in the mode of presentational immediacy and much of what has come to constitute the festival, at least from a spectator’s viewpoint, engages education on the level of presentational immediacy, though not entirely this mode alone. When information is placed into this space, the information is received in the mode of presentational immediacy and immediately becomes part of the data perceived in causal efficacy. When the dances, speeches, or songs are rehearsed and practiced, this is often in the mode of presentational immediacy where being present to vivid and immediate experiences is necessary for the incorporation and the transference of knowledge; at the same time memories and one’s ability to recall experiences via causal efficacy also play an important role in putting together dances of the culture and perception in this mode is one example of learning through causal efficacy and symbolic reference.

³³ Whitehead, Symbolism, 21.

³⁴ Tafesilafa’i Festival is the culmination of the work that Tafesilafa’i does in the Samoan community in Southern California. Tafesilafa’i is a 501(c)(3) tax exempt educational organization that focuses on preserving Samoan language and culture in the US. It proposes an indigenous pedagogy that is grounded in Samoan epistemology informed by the *fua-Samoa* or Samoan way of life.

Whitehead sees causal efficacy as complementing the "barren aesthetic display" of presentational immediacy with the "...perception of the various bodily organs, as passing on their experiences by channels of transmission and of enhancement."³⁵ The mode of causal efficacy discloses the causal relationships which result in the sense data of presentational immediacy. Causal efficacy occurs in the interactions between each "presentational immediate" event and the preceding "presentational immediate" event. With the awareness of this relationship one may come to know deeper, fuller, and more authentically. Perceptions in the mode of causal efficacy are not in the same mode as presentational immediacy, but are interrelated in that each sensory event is causally connected to a previous set of events. In causal efficacy there is a continuity in the relations between one set of presentational immediate data and another set of presentational immediate data, meaning that one lays claim to the other and is affected by the other. When taken to the nth degree, there is an imbedded notion of relation to other events and occasions in the cosmos. The preponderance of these cosmic relationships provides the basis for the Samoan concept of *va*; this interrelatedness has much bearing on how Samoans come to know. Perception in the *fa'a-Samoa* is a gift, a surprise, an occasion, and sensory perception via the three modes that process thought suggests is a gift, a surprise, an occasion of a particular kind. The gift has always been there, but to receive the gift in such a way that one gets it, understands it, uses it, is to move the gift from the realm of the unknown to the realm of the known. To receive the gift, the surprise, an occasion and in the process distinguish the *va*, discern the source, ponder the mystery, worship ultimate being, is to move the gift from the unknown to the known,

³⁵ Whitehead, Process and Reality, corrected ed., 119.

while preserving the realm of possibility, mystery, ultimate *va*, and that-which we-do-not-know-that-we-do-not-know. A story is told about Pava and Tagaloa. Pava was a mortal and Tagaloa was a god. They had an *alofi*, or meeting, one day, and Pava's son disrupted the meeting. Tagaloa struck the boy and killed him. Pava was distraught, and when he gave Tagaloa his *ava*, Tagaloa poured it on the boy and brought him back to life.³⁶ Many *va* relationships are distinguished in this story, the *va* between the divine and humans, between humans, between humans and the environment, between divine and the environment. The engagement of all *va*'s, eventually lead to peace, harmony, and tranquility; in the language of process thought, it lead to parsimony, enjoyment, and concrescence.³⁷ How does a Samoan come to know? By being in relationship, by observing the *va*, by honoring the *va* in all its multiplicity and nuances.

Because Samoans live in close-knit communities, their universe is a microcosm of a larger community in the world and abroad. Hence, there is a finite number of ways of relating to one another, and all possible permutations of the *va* have been exhausted or appropriately addressed in existing epistemological infrastructures. Having existed over thousands of years and experiencing healthy concrescence, this community has achieved a parsimonious, effective, and optimum amount of relationships in the realm of the

³⁶ If Pava, out of disappointment and distraught, had given up or sought retaliation or failed to serve Tagaloa, he would not have gotten his son back. This is the indigenous basis for service in the *fa'a-Samoa*. We serve because of our relationship with God, regardless of how bad things get. This idea is much lost in the diaspora, where "suicide bombers" are misunderstood.

³⁷ Dr. Helene Slassarev-Jamir raised the possibility of the *va* as an impediment to changes and adjustments to the life of the community, citing as an example, the wave of Tongan members leaving the UMC denomination and forming their own. While I cannot comment on the specific example without the necessary grounded data, however, the concept of the *va* does allow for setbacks, challenges, and problem to arise. However it is the maintaining of peace, tranquility and understanding and being present to different *vas* developing without loss that provides peace, harmony, and tranquility. Ostensibly if these movements are a response to a lure from God towards God's initial aim, then the setbacks and challenges can only lead to enjoyment, parsimony, and concrescence.

known and the unknown and would be considered settled.³⁸ Therefore, this community is afforded freedom to choose, selecting from a much more inclusive spectrum of experiences via the causal efficacy mode. Many of the relationships have been thought out in all their pluriformity, existing in community, over the generations, in that island-specific environment, and they have become everlasting objects forming what we referred to earlier as epistemological infrastructures. Through the concrescence process and in pondering the *va*, Samoans have developed distinctions in community which have equipped them for the work of co-creation. For example, *saili malo* or search to win, helps make Samoans effective football and rugby players. The Samoan cosmogony locates every person in close relationship to the creator god (ultimate reality), which endows them with certain powers, responsibilities, and obligations to the world. In the *fa'aSamoa*, because each person is “heir” to the Samoan creator god, this *va* or relationship to the divine, must be *fa'aaloalo*, or respected in some basic fundamental way and this acknowledgment must also be extended to all life forms.³⁹ When properly acknowledged and maintained, these relationships serve as scaffolding for education and learning to occur. *Fa'aaloalo*, respect, encourages the teacher to attend to the needs of the student, while encouraging the student to attend to the knowledge of the teacher. This means that *fa'aaloalo* is now such a vastly cosmological and deeply ontological reality for both the student and teacher that they are in a state of *miliu'u*, or one rubbing up against the other; each one is immersed respectfully in the other where physicality, though present, is of little consequence. In this state of *fa'aaloalo*-ness the knower and

³⁸ In process thought, freedom and creativity requires a settled past and an open future. This means the ability to freely choose from all possibilities and to continually transform potentiality to actuality.

the known are intricately connected and, as such, are in the presence of one another fully conscious. In this mode of perception all learners unconsciously compare new information with previous knowledge and experience and therefore require time to reflect, question, and compare.

Samoans also learn through symbolic reference. All Samoan symbols are creatively, systemically, and collectively constituted in the *fa'a-Samoa* or the Samoan Way. The *fa'a-Samoa* is how the community has built its structures, social and otherwise, to distinguish their way of life at a particular place and given time. Each symbol of the *fa'a-Samoa* is a representation of concepts or objects in the Samoan universe; each symbol is loaded with a meaning that points to a particular aspect of the *fa'a-Samoa* and invokes images, emotions, and ideas in the mind of Samoans all for the purpose of harmony and peace. Every facet of the *fa'a-Samoa* is contained in certain iconic representations which hold communal, particular, and conventional meanings. One example of this symbol is the *ie-toga* or fine mat. The *ie-toga*, is a visible element of the *fa'a-Samoa*; it is a hand-woven mat made of *laupaogo* leaves. There is nothing remarkable about the mat, other than it has come to occupy a certain and particular meaning in our collective communal consciousness. The fine mat has become a symbol signifying wholeness, respect, and reverence. The *ie-toga* is referred to as *measina* or a precious jewel which signifies royalty and everything that is complete, holistic, salvific, healing, and meaningful in the Samoan community, occupying such a revered place in the community that certain mats are given their own specific names which further ground them in the symbolism of the community. Without the presence of the *ie-toga*, an event or gathering will not be distinctively known as *fa'a-Samoa*.

³⁹ *Fa'aaloalo* is respect and *fa'aaloaloa* is the act of respecting.

The Samoan language, for example, existed, prior to the missionaries visiting the islands, as a spoken-only language. As such, the meaning of words and what they represent existed as an interpretation in the mind of the hearer. In other words, immediately after the word is uttered, its meaning is discerned and it becomes objectified in the mind of the hearer. Said in another way, once the word is spoken, a meaning is interpreted and registered in the listening of the hearer and that interpretation becomes rigid and remains immune to significant re-interpretation because the event has become the past. The only way to capture meaning in space and time is in the written format. Because it was a spoken language, the Samoan oral language did not have the added complication available to written languages, namely that written language takes on particular meanings when committed to writing; this meaning is mainly constituted in the written material, and, in the case of mathematical symbols, the meaning is in relation to other symbols and may be accessed only through algebraic rules. With the technology of written language came the regimentation of the meaning of Samoan communal symbols. In fact, it is almost impossible to capture the pure or presentational immediacy meaning - unadulterated and without interpretation - of Samoan symbols in writing. The corollary is true as well; when written symbols are expressed in verbal form, they most certainly have attained a nuanced meaning or a meaning of their own.

The *fa'a-Samoa* or the Samoan way of life is a unique and structured way of being that encompasses a unique cosmogony, indigenous language, textured faith, primary culture, and social structure.⁴⁰ Remove cosmogony and the *fa'a-Samoa* is

⁴⁰ This uniqueness flows from their cosmogony and how the Samoan creator god was the progenitor of the world, and how creation seemed to have been lured by the Samoan creator god from chaos. The Genesis creation story does not have the same “uniqueness” in the sense that it is someone

diminished; lose the indigenous language and the *fa'a-Samoa* cannot fully be known. The *faa-Samoa* is primarily a way of being that has sustained Samoans over the years. This way of being forms an epistemological mechanism which allows Samoans to come to know through experiences and impressions (empirical), through actual events and states of affairs (actual), and through structures, power mechanisms, tendencies, and social constructs (real). This is in contrast to Hume's claim that all knowledge comes from sense experience and sense-impressions, which limits knowledge of reality to the present empirical and omits those experiences received via the causal efficacy and symbolic reference modes. Because of this, knowing and using an epistemology that is drawn from and grounded in the natural *fa'a-Samoa* structure is a must in constructing a pedagogy that is unique, effective, and life giving to the Samoan community.

Samoans learn through direct knowledge (presentational immediacy), unconscious experience and memory (causal efficacy) and through social structures (symbolic reference). In addition, Samoans also come to know in communities of practice.⁴¹ If one takes the Whiteheadian categories and applies another mode of perception which incorporates communal and harmonious component, or *va* specific components, then one will begin to appreciate what one means by "Samoans also come to know in community." Communities have collective memories and a set of experiences in

else's story of creation and that there is an unnatural requirement to appropriate it as one's own; which presupposes that something is wrong that needed fixing. When one is not trying to think in English, one effortlessly thinks in their natural and indigenous language, the language of the cosmos, the ocean, slow and rhythmic. One's position in society defines who she is in relation to the cosmos, and the texture of her faith forms the basis for coming to know effortlessly. All this is to say that the *faa-Samoa* or the Samoan way is the context in which Samoans are found naturally in the environment and it is being present to this that makes for a good epistemological construct.

⁴¹ The concept of communities of practice was pioneered by the Institute for Research on Learning, a spin-off of the Xerox Corporation in Palo Alto, CA. The institute pursues a cross-disciplinary approach to learning research, involving cognitive scientists, organization anthropologists, and traditional

communal presentational immediacy, communal causal efficacy, and communal symbolism, which, when awakened, can be globally transformational. An experience that may occur in the realm of presentational immediacy in one community may yet be received in the realm of communal causal efficacy and symbolism in another. Using the Whiteheadian categories of perception, one is able to discern that which we know, which also can clarify that which we do not know. However, in harmonious communities, which comes about in observation of the *va*, one begins to access that which one does not know, that one does not know. As an example, take the rising of the *palolo* in Samoa.⁴² To be totally conscious of the *palolo*, its habits, the timing, the implements used to collect *palolo*, the protocols on how it is to be received, and the ramifications of any adverse actions towards the fish means being in community.⁴³ With the *palolo* rising now occurring in fewer locations, knowledge of the *palolo* that was perceived presentationally during fishing in many communities is now perceived only symbolically and through causal efficacy in others. Because Samoans live, share, and have their being in community, therefore in addition to all other ways of knowing, Samoans also come to know in the *nu'u* or community. Though one can come to know in isolation and only at the single level, alas, it will not contain the totality of the *fa'a-Samoa*. In the islands, the villages serve as natural communities, delineated by geographical village boundaries.

educators. The Samoan idea of community is *nuu* which means village, but it has a flavor of folks working, playing, and surviving together.

⁴² *Palolo* is a worm-like “fish” that visits Samoa twice a year; it is a delicacy. Growing up in Samoa *taga palolo* or fishing for *palolo* occurred in the presentational immediacy realm of knowledge. Recent developments that have caused the fish to surface in fewer places in Samoa has relegated the knowledge of *palolo* unconsciously to the realm of causal efficacy as a past and unconscious influence, such that Samoans’ knowledge of the fish is received only through stories and other people’s experiences.

Additionally, these communities are also inscribed verbally by their *faalupega*⁴⁴ or salutation which become *maota tauave* or carry over in the diaspora. While the villages serve as natural communities, in diaspora, the churches and faith communities have assumed that responsibility. These communities, where learning in the Samoan community takes place, operate under the following assumptions:

- *Learning is fundamentally an organic phenomenon.* Process thought suggests that reality has a developmental nature, emphasizing becoming rather than static existence, we can extend these traits to the learning exercise and equate learning to a process that is developing and becoming. People organize their learning around the social communities to which they belong, and these communities are constantly being formed and reformed. I have found it easier to teach during teachable moments in the life of the community at life-cycle events or *faalavelave*. Teaching outside these moments is seen as traditional, business as usual, and pre-supposes an inorganic process, which often does not move the community towards meaningful action. Schools can also become powerful learning environments for students whose organic social communities coincide with that of the school's.

⁴³ See Janice Vele, wrote and produced "Making a Traditional *Palolo* Net." This is a video on making a net to catch the palolo. (American Samoan Community College, Pago Pago, American Samoa, 1998).

⁴⁴ I wrote elsewhere an extended explanation of this concept, what it means for each village and the implications for community building. Briefly, it is a litany recited at formal functions which points to those *matai* titles that settled the village from day one. It is a place where one relates to the founders of the village and forms the basis for nationalism.

- *Knowledge enjoys prominence in the life of communities that share values, beliefs, languages, and ways of doing things.* Concrescence in Whiteheadian thought means, the becoming of entities and in the process of transitioning from one occasion to the next, concrescence means becoming concrete, if only for a brief moment.⁴⁵ In the diaspora, the knowledge that Samoans brought with them from the islands needs to be refined, nuanced, and integrated into the diasporic communities on the mainland. The divine vision continues to be harmony and peace, but the community in diaspora is now charged with forming new *nu'u* or communities of practice, where indigenous knowledge is integrated into the activities, social relations, and expertise of the newly constituted communities. In the diaspora, churches are working to be the villages, places, and community, where new-knowledge can be created, nuanced, and concretized toward God's initial aim.
- *The processes of learning and membership in a community of practice are inseparable.* Because learning is intertwined with community membership, membership is what lets us belong to and adjust our status in the community. As we change our learning, our identity--and our relationship to the community--changes. And because Samoans learn through structures, power mechanisms, tendencies, symbolic reference, and social constructs, the new structures must have certain membership requirements that must be set up and

⁴⁵ Cobb and Griffin, Process Theology, 15.

adhered to so that a healthy sense of belonging, and thus learning, can be enhanced.

- *Knowledge is inseparable from practice.* It is not possible to know without doing. It is through mentoring, modeling, and being present to the learner that knowledge is acquired. As such, a structure that promotes and enhances the relationships between the learner and teacher would work well in the Samoan community. And a structure that embodies both the *faa-Samoa* and the dominant society ways of knowing in the diaspora would serve the Samoan community well. Traditional western style classroom learning would have to be revised to include other spaces that can serve both as classrooms and, as learning expands, to include other forms and crucibles for knowledge.
- *Empowerment--or the ability to contribute to a community--creates the potential for learning.* Circumstances in which we engage in real action that has positive results for the community create the most powerful learning environments. Research has shown that Samoan youth do first think of others before they would think of themselves.⁴⁶ The Samoan community, in the islands as well as in the US, gathers during *faalavelave* or life-cycle events, and because these events are opportunities to contribute to the extended

⁴⁶ When asked what they would like to be when they grow up, Samoan youth's answers gathered around the following poles [1] Others – their families come first. Responses such as “pay back my debt to my parents” or “take care of my parents” or “become something that my family is proud of.” The respondents are mostly youth in school or are looking for work. [2] Survival – “get a job” or “find a better job” or “go back to Samoa.” These young adults have been out of school for a while or are between jobs, looking to help out with the family.

family and exhibit compassion, these events create huge opportunities for sharing. It is a wise educator who embeds knowledge in both work practices and social relations during these events.

Samoan Epistemology

With the *fa'a-Samoa* as a basis of the Samoan reality, the question “How does a Samoan come to know” takes on a relational and process-centric significance. Since knowing concerns how our minds relate to reality and whether these relationships are helpful or unhelpful, knowledge in the Samoan context is not only about senses, logic, reason, ideas, thoughts, memories, emotions, and all things mental, but it encompasses the ever-changing relationships between the actors, and their different and seemingly competitive natures. For us to determine what gets consciously accepted as knowledge, we have to devise methods of evaluation that are informed by the Samoan understanding of reality and use that knowledge to promote healthy relationships, to achieve communal goals.

Our senses will continue to be valid ways of collecting information about the world, but Samoans also have a cultural-extrasensory means of collecting information, that is located in their native language and the *fa'a-Samoa* which underscores their reality. While reason is often seen as a method of gaining knowledge and acquiring understanding, an in-depth analysis of the make-up of a Samoan person reveals that there is more to knowledge than reason. And while logic maintains consistency within a set of knowledge, the Samoan emphasis on human interactions and relationships woos the unexpected and finds a place for novelty. Objectivity is often cited as a means of

associating knowledge with reality to determine its truth; however, in the Samoan context, every bit of knowledge when procured in the *va* is part of reality and thus accurate. Much of the knowledge in the Samoan context has been distilled into *alagaupu*⁴⁷ or proverbs to such an extent that to know Samoans is to know their proverbs. *alagaupu*. A proper Samoan epistemology is a rational epistemology informed by the reality and experience of the Samoan people.

Path (*ala*) of words (*upu*) is the literal translation of the term *alagaupu*. It suggests that words cut a path or provide a road upon which to travel. As such, this is how words function for Samoans. Words illumine the way and give direction. When a particularity is observed over and over and a truth is extracted from this particularity, an attempt is usually made to integrate this truth and to extend it to other particularities of facts or instances. When this is done properly and, when tested, found to be helpful, then it becomes an *alagaupu*. These integrations serve as summaries of experiences in a process that omits particular details of the instances and integrates them based on a set of criteria that is communally mediated. In essence these word paths, *alagaupu*, allow generalization from a known particularity to be transported to other similar contexts.

Each Tafesilafa'i festival adopts an *alagaupu* as the central theme. The proverb contains a truth about the Samoan reality and every dance, rhetoric, essay, costumes, attire, and song offered by the participants is to define, refine, display, unpack, witness, explain, and add to the understanding of this theme. Because these themes are highly

⁴⁷ *Alagaupu* literally translates to "ways of the word." It cautions the hearer to refrain from presentational immediate judgment, it invokes in the hearer events that undergird symbolic references in the Samoan community, while it builds relationships in the causal efficacy mode, as long as it does not infringe on other relational demands.

abstracted, in that there is little known reference as to how the proverb came about, what happened, or where the event occurred or other particularities, youth groups that participate get very creative in unpacking these treasures and the exegetical process is fun and generative.

In 1999 the theme was "*Ia Toe Afua le Taeao*" "*Begin Anew.*" The world was buzzing with Y2K concerns and the new millennium brought with it new resolve to be more fervent in our quest to preserve culture while welcoming newer challenges. In 2001 the theme "*Ne'i Naunau i le I'a Ae Maumau ai le Upega* – Careful not to Compromise the Net," invited the young people to look at the national pastime, fishing with a net. Sometimes we are so caught up with getting the fish that we throw the net into the deep, or into the corals. When the net is lost to the deep, your family will go without fish for awhile. When your net gets tangles in the corals, it will take you a while to retrieve it. These themes were so powerful that the songs, rhetoric, essays, costumes, attires, dances became so colorful and creative that they signified life itself. The idea of these proverbs is to get the youth to think critically about the wisdom of their ancestors and to find application in their daily lives.

How then is process epistemology illustrated in the Tafesilafa'i Festival? The feelings and emotions that are invoked in the participants during the festivities come to them via causal efficacy. This is stored in their proverbs, language and ancestral relationships. We can say that this knowledge is in their DNA. The young people participating in Tafesilafa'i just know that the space they have come into is home to who they are. The presentational immediate sensory that that confronts them during the festival inform, augment and stoke the emotions and feelings they brought with them.

Through the constant interaction of the settled data of their feelings and their own symbolic reference data, the participants come to know as process thought understands coming to know. In addition, there is knowledge that can only be authentically accessed when participants are in community, and it is the theory of this research that Samoans also come to know in *nu'u* or community. These relationships that form community are maintained through the proper observance of the *va* between entities, which invoke the observance of the ultimate *va* between the person and the divine, in the solemn act of worship. In essence, coming to know in relationship occurs in quiet contemplation of the cosmos in the Samoan act *tapua'i*.⁴⁸

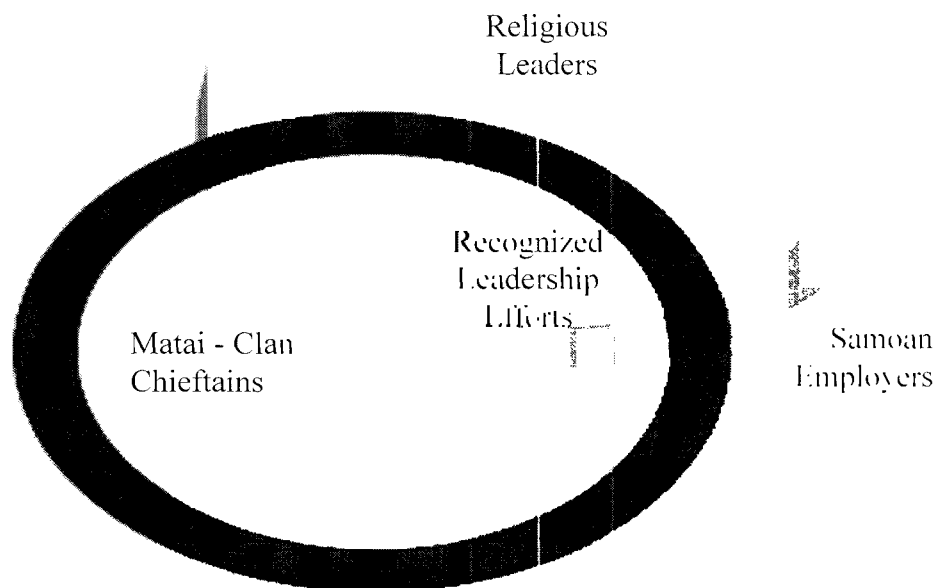
Goals & Aspirations

Gandhi said it well: “We must be the change we want to see in the world.” Until we do, there can be no fundamental change. We attract opportunities, jobs, success but if we do not know how to stand in that space, the opportunities will eventually disappear. One’s ultimate prayer is, “Dear God, make me the change you want to see in the world.” Too many say, when I get the job, I will change. When the circumstances change, I will change. How life seemed to work may just be the opposite. When you change, the universe also changes, if only because you are part of the universe. This is the great miracle; this is what happens; this is where the heavy lifting occurs. How might I be the educator that God would have me be? Instead of complaining about the government, what kind of citizen am I? I need to show up more.

⁴⁸ *Tapua'i* means to worship in Samoan. It is the act of complete reverence of the divine, it is total submission to the will of God, it is aligning one’s ego with the mind of God, it is taking on the persona of God, and becoming an issue of God. In the language of the indigenous Samoan religion it is becoming a Sa Tagaloa.

I would like to take what we have done with *Tafesilafa'i* and expand it so that it becomes an ongoing educational event for the Samoan community in diaspora.⁴⁹ I am unsure how to do that, but I know that it is a process that will lead to a people coming alive with vitality making small and huge contributions to the world leading it to peace and harmony. If the work is to be done at its most efficient nexus, the leader must come from where the three circles intersect in the diagram below, the “recognized leadership effort.” In the language of process, a “concrete” leader is one who is conscious of the *matai* cultural system, religious faith system, and market global system.

Samoan Community Members



Structure of Recognized Leadership among Samoan Americans in Southern California

⁴⁹ *Tafesilafa'i* was originally a war club of the warrior Nafanua. She utilized it to win important battles during her *saili malo* or quest for glory. It can also mean a face to face meeting between two or

The above figure represents all Samoan community members in diaspora. For *Tafesilafa'i* to survive and thrive, its leadership must be located where the church leaders, the *matais*, and those with resources intersect. Those who propose to lead the Samoan community have to have influence in all three spheres because these three spheres represent the totality of Samoan leadership. When on an island surrounded by water and subjected to various acts of nature, solidarity is a value that is most cherished and thus the community survives together and there cannot be more leaders than necessary to survive. Where the circles intersect is where an authentic leader, to gather the community in diaspora, will emerge, if only because he or she would represent each sphere of influence and be located within the realm of recognized leadership efforts. In this realm, the overarching propensity of the leader is to be a clearing where love abounds.

Whitehead's ontology puts emancipatory and caring activities at the core of this reality. Elaborating on his idea of "feeling," Whitehead suggests that "[a]t the basis of our existence is the sense of 'worth.'"⁵⁰ This is the entire premise of the Samoan concept *fa'aaloalo* or respect which is required for maintaining and keeping proper *va*. The necessity to hear all sides, and stay in the *va* without loss, is the reason why the one to lead the community has to be respectful of and sensitive to all three spheres of influence. Respect cultivates the clearing where love takes root and grows. It is because all community members are progeny of the Samoan creator god, that members of the community expect, command, and must be paid proper respect, reverence, and presence.

more leaders. In the diaspora it is a week-long Festival in Long Beach where Samoan Youth groups gather to exchange dances, rhetoric, songs, and games.

⁵⁰ Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, 109.

Any plan for implementation must arise from the fact that "[e]xistence...is the upholding of value intensity. Also, no unit can separate itself from the others, and from the whole. And yet each unit exists in its own right. It upholds value intensity for itself, and this involves sharing value intensity with the universe."⁵¹ Said in a different way, recognizing the dignity of all human beings has to be at the core of implementing any meaningful changes in the Samoan community.

One thing is certain, the plan for implementation must be open, laced with feelings, emotions, subjected to influence, connection, holism, vagueness, and process, and it must be grounded in Samoan indigenous values. In a word, the plan for implementation must recognize differences and be at peace with diversity. The plan need not be so much bright, perhaps, as warm and fuzzy. From a beingness that is open, with purpose, feeling, and values, the plan for implementation must be about "caring work." Such "caring work" can be problematic within the neoclassical western framework, because that framework has little room for concepts of intimacy, interdependence and nurturance. And because there is no concept of value beyond that given by atomistic and individual utility, our only hope in the diaspora is a Samoan process-oriented approach that begins to attack such sterility at the root. As a matter of everyday strategy, a Samoan educational *theorist* will still often find that phrasing her arguments largely within usual mainstream modes of discourse is the best way to achieve Samoan indigenous ends. But for a practicing Samoan *educator*, it might be more satisfactory, whether engaging in research or advocacy, to proceed with a sense that the universe *is* such that what one struggles for is *faaaloaloa* or respected, and it does matter at some fundamental level.

⁵¹ Ibid., 111.

Summary

In this chapter, we have attempted first to answer the question, How do creatures learn? Using the language of process thought and epistemology, we have argued a particular epistemology that is grounded in the work of Alfred North Whitehead. Then an attempt was made to answer the more particular question – how do Samoans learn and what is the relationship between process and Samoan epistemology? We have identified some ideas that are parallel to those put forth by Whitehead, and we have distinguished yet other ways of knowing in the Samoan community. Certainly, there is room – and process thought allows for it – for a specific epistemology that is indigenously Samoan from which we can construct a pedagogy that is life-giving to Samoans in diaspora. From a Samoan epistemology and a life-giving pedagogy comes the curriculum that can be transformational. Then I suggested what the research has supported: that there is a certain structure that supports a Samoan community in the diaspora, concretizing that vision of a learning space in the *Tafesilafa'i* conversation, where Samoans in diaspora can gain access to what the divine had in mind when Samoans were first created. The final part of this chapter was setting the “sail” to achieve some of my goals and aspiration for how one can utilize a Samoan epistemology to implement some of the greater good goals that we share in the world. This leads us to the next chapter which takes this knowledge and applies it to community building and organizing.

CHAPTER 5

Interaction for Community Building & Organizing

The ministerial style of Jesus suggests that Christian ministry initiate a personal 'presence with' people, empower them as agent-subjects of their faith and call them into partnership and community.¹

Thomas H. Groome, Sharing Faith

This chapter begins with a definition of community building and organizing as applicable to the research and how it has taken form in the Samoan community with regards to the Tafesilafa'i conversations. The next portion of the chapter deepens the concept of the *va*, extricating additional nuances in relationships between the divine and humans, between humans, between victim and offender, between person and self, between persons and the environment. Finally the Tafesilafa'i festival is examined under the rubric of community building and organizing, further grounding the research question of Samoan epistemology in the diaspora.

Community Building and Organizing

Community building is often characterized as bringing individuals together so they can form a cohesive group that has established trust and a deep sense of connection. In Samoa, the villages serve this function, with their *faalupega* and *malae*, and during life cycle events, it is the *aiga potopoto* or extended family with their familiar connections that build community. To a smaller scale, it is the immediate family cultivating communal resources that builds trust, connection, and cohesiveness. Community

¹ Thomas H. Groome, Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry – The Way of Shared Praxis (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991), 332.

building occurs naturally in Samoa because of the infrastructures present, namely, language, land, and law (matai system). However, in the diaspora community building must take on a newer urgency now that the indigenous infrastructures are markedly missing.

From the research, we have learned that the perceived urgency of information received via presentational immediacy, often overwhelms and looms large over the Samoan individual, and Samoan social groups, such that perception via causal efficacy and symbolic reference is all but relegated to the deep unconscious. This is more pronounced in the diaspora where opportunities to connect are fewer and far between, and the connections made are short lived and do not allow time for cohesiveness. However, another reason why presentational material is more dominant in the diaspora is because our community lives in, what Neil Postman refers to as, the age of show business, where “television is our culture’s principal mode of knowing,”² and “teaching and entertainment are inseparable.”³ Television and increasingly the computer screen has become the command center of the new epistemology, serving as the person’s most trusted companion and friend. In the Samoan community where relationships are all important, perception via presentational immediacy eventually impacts causal efficacy and symbolic reference perception, and also effect relationships honed over thousands of years.

Community building, in the Samoan community in the diaspora is assumed by the churches where potlucks, weekly services, and life-cycle connections are easily made in

² Postman, Amusing Ourselves to Death, 92.

³ Ibid., 146.

the absence of a village. The *aiga potopoto* also continues to have an influence on community building, though not as powerful as in Samoa. This is because of the absence of the land power base for the *matai* system to operate, and because of the lack of communal resources in the diaspora. In the context of the Tafesilafa'i conversation, cohesive connections and community building are presupposed and the gathering each year is a way of organizing these "villages," to look critically at community challenges in Samoa and the diaspora.

Organizing is bringing people and organizations together to affect change. This is one of the most fundamental, and often misunderstood, elements of problem solving in a democracy. Because change does not define or sell itself, organizing is crucial for motivating changes, building capacity to pursue it, and building constituencies that will help see changes through. Some confuse organizing with pressure tactics or with mindless politics or with mere "outreach" programs by social service providers. And some think it is only important at the "grassroots" level in a community and not among those with significant influence and resources. Many observers are documenting the contributions of organizing to community well being, empowerment and active citizenship.⁴

Tafesilafa'i organizes the community for the purpose of problem solving, bringing people together to define problems and to make changes. However, before it does any problem solving, the stage has to be set so trust is built up and the appropriate *va* established before natural problem solving discourse can begin. Tafesilafa'i is not about marketing "our" objective, asking support from "them," but Tafesilafa'i purports to

⁴ Mary Beth Rogers. Cold Anger: A Story of Faith and Power Politics (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 1990), 1-10. See also Harry C. Boyte. Community Is Possible: Repairing America's Roots (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1984).

shape goals and strategies for action. Each activity that constitutes this organizing effort – family Sunday, 24 hour prayer marathon, leaders conference, Gospel night, Mr. & Miss Tafesilafa'i, dances, songs and games – is a step along the way. Tafesilafa'i may not bring all of the parties together on a given issue and it may fail to affect change, but what it does not accomplish in organizing it makes up for in community building capital.

Organizing the Samoan Community in Diaspora

There are over 7,200 Samoans in the city of Long Beach, which constitutes less than 1% of the total population in the City.⁵ There are over 133,000 Samoans (when combined with other races) in the US, 62,000 in American Samoa, 182,000 in Samoa and 115,000 in New Zealand, so there are less than 500,000 known Samoans in the entire world⁶. This constitutes the community that I worked with and it was my goal to help my people; to find out what is wrong in the community, formulate that in a research question. suggest theories for solving it and test those theories. The research for this work officially started in 2001 when I took two semesters of participatory action research classes. I had a goal of helping my people and this entails identifying a problem in the community, isolating the cause of the problem, identifying the stakeholders connected to

⁵ U.S. Department of the Census, 2000.

⁶ These are personal estimates based on my research and personal experience and contacts with the Samoan community.

the problem, suggesting theories for changing whatever socio-economic condition a certain group of stakeholder defines as the problem and implementing changes to solve the problem.

In the early years of this work, there was very little motivation for gathering the community. Organizing for action is a foreign concept to Samoans for two reasons. First, Samoans trusted their leaders implicitly. Throughout the history of Samoa, their leaders have shown great restraint from selfish appetites, have governed for the long haul, and have agendas consistent with that of the community. The thought of a leader that does not have the best interest of the people in mind is unheard of. While there are leaders who obviously do not subscribe to this mindset, they have mostly been identified and are treated accordingly. The second reason is because organizing for action sounded like usurping some basic *va* or relationship. To organize seemed such a drastic measure to take, without the necessary *va* building due process. The idea of organizing proved too radical a step for the Samoan community in the diaspora who are still trying to learn the language of the dominant culture. The motivation to sustain any actions was not evident in the community, and so Tafesilafa'i initially was just an exercise in community building, inviting folks to reflect on what captures their imagination, what really matters to them and their children, but more important what values would cause them to act.

As the Festival grew, the capacity of the community for change grew as well, sometimes with an emphasis on what we can do ourselves and sometimes with an emphasis on what others ought to do—a company, a public agency, a nonprofit, or some other player—to help us. Affecting changes in the world depends on having the capacity and using that capacity to accomplish things and not be content merely with moral fervor

or inspiring talk. The most important social problem solving that faces Tafesilafa'i involve creating two things that can be very challenging to create in the diaspora is a legitimate mandate to act (the will), and the tangible capacity (the way) needed to take action that will produce real results. The research showed Tafesilafa'i contributing to both, though the early years saw more energy invested in the first one – gathering information, setting up infrastructure, building relationships and developing support for ideas. I will now say more about building relationships.

Reaching out to the Second Generation

Samoans have had a formal relationship with the United States since 1900 when the cessation treaty was signed on April 17, 1900. Prior that, the United States and other European nations have had strong influence on the Samoan islands since 1830 when the first missionaries landed in Samoa. Similar to the Irish, Italian, and Jewish immigrants who arrived in the early 1900s, early Samoan immigrants to the United States gradually assimilated to mainstream American culture and ascended the socioeconomic ladder. Their second generation offspring are by and large, physically and emotionally rooted in the United State and lack the language and cultural skills or desire to live in their ancestral homes. Many have taken on American names and have married outside the culture making tracing their Samoan ancestry difficult.⁷ Ruben Rumbaut's finding highlights this reality in Second Generation of immigrant parents. In a decade long longitudinal study highlighting transnational attachments of second generation young

⁷ Second generation persons of Samoan ancestry that populate the main stream culture include, Greg Louganis (Olympic gold medalist diver), Dwayne Johnson (Wrestler, movie personality), Troy Polamalu (NFL Player), Marques Tuiasosopo (NFL Player), Lofa Tatupu (NFL Player), The Katinas (Christian Musicians) and Bob Apisa (Pacific Rim Sports – Contract Advisers).

adults to their sending countries, Rumbaut's findings reveal low levels of transnational activities. Part of Rumbaut's findings, confirmed in our research, is that language plays a critical role in the maintenance of transnational ties. Young people from Spanish-speaking countries in the Americas are much more likely to be fluent bilingual into adulthood than the rest of the sample. Religious involvement also factor into the variations in transnational attachment.⁸

The second wave of Samoan immigrants came to the United States during World War 2 (1939-1945) when the United States military recruited heavily in Samoa, affording the next round of immigrants to the United States. When the war was over Samoan soldiers were given the opportunity to leave the military and stay in Samoa or find new assignment in the United States, most opted to relocate to the United States, and thus began the journey of importing relatives to the United States. It was the dream of each Samoan soldier to help with their family by sending for them to come to the United States. These Samoans were found populating around military bases in the United States. Their contribution to the Samoan community was the establishment of the Samoan churches in the United States. The primary reason why churches were formed was for socializing. It was the place where Samoan immigrants come to fellowship with others and to develop a stronger identification with their Samoan cultural heritage to help them withstand the onslaught of the American individualistic and materialistic culture.

While the Tafesilafa'i conversation has had an impact on the various youth groups participating in the events, to quantify the impact of the differences in the worldviews of

⁸ Ruben G. Rumbaut, "Severed or Sustained Attachments? Language, Identity, and Imagined Communities in the Post-Immigrant Generation," in The Changing Face of Home: The Transnational Lives of the Second Generation, ed. Peggy Levitt and Mary C. Waters (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2002), 43-95.

those youth who have participated from those who have not, is beyond the scope of this work. Milton Vickerman talks about an interesting paradox from his research on second generation West Indians in New York City. Vickerman discovered that the West Indian community in New York has recreated its culture so effectively that the second generation can access their homeland without ever having to go home.⁹ To some extent the Tafesilafa'i conversation has this impact on the community, though there is still room for improvement.

Community Building Relationships

Persons and God: Understanding the relationship between person and God is basic to community building in the Samoan community. There is no audience so young that it cannot relate to God. There is no poverty so abject that it must forgo a relationship with God. There is no education so exalted that it is not modified by the idea of God. In relations to our topic, there is no subject of public interest – politics, war, culture, news, science and sports – that does not find a connection to God. Reflecting on several journal entries, it occurred to me that the Samoan cosmogony forms the very foundation of a Samoan's connection to God.¹⁰ The Latin phrase, coined by Renee Descartes which became a foundational element of western philosophy "cogito ergo sum" ("I think, therefore I am,") when viewed within a Samoan cosmogony would translate to "I belong, therefore I am" and forms the foundational element of the basic *va* in the Samoan

⁹ Milton Vickerman, "Second-Generation West Indian Transnationalism," in The Changing Face of Home: The Transnational Lives of the Second Generation, ed. Peggy Levitt and Mary C. Waters (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2002), 341-66.

¹⁰ Several entries in the journal speak about recurring questions often asked of me when interviewing others. Questions such as "what is your name" "where are you from" "are you related to so and so" these questions seemed innocuous enough, but when I reflect upon it, it points to a desire to connect, both the interviewer as well as the interviewee. It also underscores a longing for connection and familiarity.

community. This fundamental connection to the source of all there was, is, and is yet to be lends value to the Samoan community, and recovering this connection in the diaspora renders every other newly formed relationship meaningful and worthy of attention.¹¹

The specifics of the Samoan cosmogony were covered in Chapter 4 under the rubric of coming to know, and the maintenance of this *va* between person and God has further implications for the *fa'a-Samoa* and community building and organizing in diasporic communities. Reverence for God, progenitor of humanity, because of our maternal connections concretizes the *va* and sets up other relationships in community building. In other words, when the *va* between persons and God is properly paid attention to, other relationships will follow. The alternative is reverence for God because of fear, and this often leads to separation, conflict, and isolation. The maternal connection forms a genealogical link between persons and God, meaning that persons are related to God in some basic fundamental way. This inter-relationship extends through the animal world, the cosmos, and the environment forming one huge family that is both divine and secular, eternal and temporal at the same time. The inter-connection extends through the animal kingdom and is beyond the scope of this work, but the harmony of these inter-relationships reflects the harmony and balance of peace in the world.

Harmony between the person and God is achieved by privileging the balance, equality and complementarity of all things. This is the whole premise of *fa'aaloalo* or respect in the Samoan worldview. When we recognize the equality and complementarity of all, we can begin to respect all, and come to appreciate further the *va* between person and God, nurtured and maintained through worship or *tapua'i*. The *va* between the

¹¹ Informal conversation with Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese Efi during the Samoan Language Conference in the Summer of 2005, Pago Pago American Samoa.

person and the divine, when properly observed, maintained, and respected emits peace, harmony, and wellbeing. In Samoan society, *tapu*, or taboo, and *feagaiga*, or sacred covenants, circumscribe the nature of the *va* between persons and God and observing these boundaries leads to harmony, energy, and catharsis.

Since Samoans believe that they were created in Samoa by their god Tagaloa, this non-negotiable begins to form the foundation of the Samoan worldview. Though some accounts of the Samoan creation story renders God as a mere progenitor of creation, as opposed to a God that creates *ex-nihilo*, all accounts of creation place God squarely in the middle of creation; distinguished from other, connected only via the *va*. Essentially, all beings are genealogically related to this source and emanate from this beginning. For effective community building and organizing in the Samoan community in the diaspora, the recognition of this sacred *va* is important.¹² The story of the relationship between persons and God interprets the world around us, allows Samoans to comprehend reality, and invites them to act accordingly. Though very few know the Samoan creation story, the idea that each Samoan is related to a supreme being is not lost in translation.¹³ Social scientists have put forward migratory theories that suggest the origin of Samoans from other parts of the globe, but the Samoans are clear that they were created by God on their land.¹⁴

¹² A cursory survey of where Samoans are located in the United States will reveal major military bases throughout the country such as Pearl Harbor, HI, Long Beach, CA, Oceanside, CA, Minot ND, Seattle, WA. A family member usually joins the military and through that relationship the rest of the family slowly immigrates into the US.

¹³ One of the interview questions given to all interviewees and gathering is “Can you recite the Solo o le Va?” Most respondents could not recite the poem. Only those that were taking the class at American Samoa Community College and had it fresh on their note books were able to recite the poem.

When events are interpreted uninformed by this connection, the events become meaningless and without importance, but when located in the context of the *va*, events take on powerful meaning and community happens. Every entity in the physical world has a specific nature, and it is the nature of a Samoan to ponder and maintain the *va*, meditate upon the sacred, understand the connections, and act according to that relationship. From this worldview it is clear that knowledge, to have meaning for Samoans, must be constructed of relationships, framed in the spiritual and administered in safe, close, and cozy relationships. Knowledge constructed outside this context will be deemed suspect and received with much reservation, if at all.

Persons and Persons: Other than the Person-God connection, the *va* between persons is the most presentationally revered of all *va* relationships. Meaning that this is the *va* that is easily discerned when in community. The maintenance of inter-person relationships are of the utmost importance in the Samoan culture; paying attention to this *va* defines the outward manifestation of culture and delineates what gets received as presentational immediacy data. A simple example is the expression *tulou*. It is the Samoan equivalent of “excuse me,” but the term connotes humility and must be uttered with the utmost display of self-effacement for it to be meaningful; furthermore, the expression is accompanied with a bowing of the head signifying the presence of the divine. Having first established a connection with the divine, a Samoan then establishes person to person relations to further continue to respond to the call to *tapua’i* or worship. Journal entries

¹⁴ Heyerdal, Fatu Hiva. See also R. B. Dixon, “The Peopling of the Pacific,” Phillipine Magazine [Manila], 26(1929):244-47.

revealed that the *va* between persons is kept *tapu*, *sa* or maintained through the observance of rules, laws, codes and ordinances.¹⁵

Human life works when there is harmony between persons. Disharmonies arise when conflicts are allowed to occur, and conflict arises when the *va*, *tuâoi*, *tapu*, *sa*, or boundaries are transgressed, misunderstood, or not properly maintained. Conflicts are symptomatic of a disturbed *va* or disharmony. In the Samoan community, disharmonies are resolved through the bringing together of forgiveness and remorse, on the one hand, with the privileging of *alofa*, or love and compassion, and *aiga*, family on the other.

As with the relationship between person and God, there exists in the relationship between persons certain *tapu*. These *tapu* are inscribed by sacred covenants called *feagaiga*. As a result of these *tapu* and *feagaiga*, boundaries or *tuâoi* emerge. The term *feagaiga* refers to both status and covenant. It is first a position given to women of a family and a promise for the well-being of others.

In this harmony between persons, there are numerous relationships of significance. Of these, I discuss three relations: between parent and child; between brother and sister; and between victim and offender. Each provides a different and interesting insight into the Samoan understandings of the *va* and how harmony, peace and

¹⁵ There was a pattern of rules of engagement that revolve around "*fa'aaloalo*" or respect when encountering other persons. One example is the habit of taking one's shoes off when entering a home. It is an unwritten rule in the Samoan community, and the only time that I noted that this rule was even "mentioned" was when adults were giving instructions to children. Adults are expected to take their shoes off when they enter a home but it was noted in several instances that "strangers" were not required to take their shoes off. Some "strangers" when told to keep their shoes on, took it literally and kept them on, others went ahead and took them off anyway. When the question of when this tradition started, many adults first point to the narrative when Moses was asked to take his shoes off for he was on hallowed ground. Other responses revolved around it being a sign of "*fa'aaloalo*" or respect by not bringing dirty shoes into living quarters. In Samoan houses, the floor is often used for sleeping.

well-being transpires in community building.

Parent to Child: The *va* between the parent and the child is sacred. This sacredness is derived from the primary relationship between the person and God. When the child is created, then separated and distinguished from the mother, there exists a *va* or distance that is both spiritual and material between the parent and the child. This separation, called *va*, is characterized by the *sa*, *tapu*, or boundaries, which accompanies creation. This *va* is maintained as the mother nurtures her child from birth (when the child first emerges from the womb) and continues as she begins to feed, speak and hold the child. The father, together with the mother, nurtures the child throughout life, giving the child instructions and setting examples of values that ought to be adopted. Initially, the burden of maintaining the *va* is shouldered by the parents, and, as the child grows, this responsibility is shared by both child and parents.

Good *va* between the parent and child serves as a metaphor for good *va* between heads of families and family members, and between the state and its citizens. Samoans recognize that the emotions and values of love and compassion begin in the microcosm of the home, in the *va*, between the parent and the child. Compassion for people in the macrocosm of humanity draws from the good *va* between the parent and the child. Research has shown that maintaining this *va* is best done one-on-one, by the power of the parents to give blessings, or *faamanuiaga*, and conversely to impose curses, or *malaia*, on their children. It is the goal of every offspring to receive the *fa'amanuiaga* from the parents for their *tautua*, or service, before they pass on. Community also ensures that these prophecies, good or bad, become self-fulfilling in the lives of the participants.

Making sure that there are more people with *fa'amanuiaga* than *malaia* makes for harmony between the parents and the children. Invariably, harmony between parent and child breeds harmony in society.

Brother to Sister: The sacred and special relationship between brother and sister in the Samoan community is another distinguishing cultural feature. A close examination of this relationship will address some of the gender issues that have arisen in contemporary discourse. Similar to other relationships, harmony presides in this *va* when the sacred character of the relationship is respected. This sacred relationship between brother and sister is referred to as *feagaiga*. The *feagaiga* is both status and covenant, granting a higher status to the sister in comparison with her brother, but it also governs how the sister relates to her brother from her position of power. It underlines indigenous Samoan gender principles and spills over to how the Samoan community is organized socially and politically. Formerly the *feagaiga* was the birthright of the aristocracy, reserved for the crown; however, Christianity has extended the *feagaiga* status to all families and the pastor of the church is also called a *feagaiga*. The pastors are given the status *feagaiga* as they now occupy the highest level in Samoan society.

The relationship between brother and sister underscores the ideal of how males are to relate to females. Indigenous Samoan society extolled the virtues of women as special and different but complementary to the virtues of men. The *feagaiga* was founded on the principle that women have the gift of producing and nurturing life, and this role is to be extended to how she relates to others, especially her brother. As bearers and nurturers of children, women are seen as sharing divinity with the gods. Similar to other

relationships, the sister-brother *va* is maintained through various codes of conduct that mediate any pain that may come from usurping the codes, as well as the blessings that come from adherence. The *feagaiga* of brother and sister is therefore not only the harmony between sister and brother, it also represents that of woman and man, female and male and each core relationships in family and in society.

Victim to Offender: The third harmony between people addressed here is that between the victim and the offender where the boundary between right and wrong, between good and evil, is most pronounced. Justice in indigenous Samoan communities involved restoring family, village, and personal harmony. Punishment for wrongs committed is administered, not just according to the pain imposed on the physical being but according to the pain imposed on the spiritual or the *mauli* as well. When an offence is committed, disharmony ensues and restoring harmony needs to follow, in addition to any other measures of justice available. The *ifoga* is key to restoring that harmony. The *ifoga* is an ancient Samoan ritual where the offending party pleads for pardon from the family of the victim. In early Samoan times it was done mainly for serious breaches such as murder and adultery: murder because of the termination of life, and adultery because of the problems with illegitimate inheritance. In these cases there is an imperative on the family of the offending party to perform *ifoga* as soon as possible. In the intervening period between the incident and *ifoga*, retribution by the family of the victim upon the family of the perpetrator is culturally permissible.

There are three components of the *ifoga*: (1) a sense of remorse and shame by the perpetrator; (2) accountability by the family and village; and (3) forgiveness by the

victim's family. The only way that harmony can be restored when an offense is committed is to recognize in the *ifoga* the co-existence of remorse and forgiveness. One can not gain harmony with remorse alone, and obviously harmony eludes us as well if we just forgive. The Samoan saying, *e mu le taulaga i le faamagalo*, meaning the penance of the penitent gains substance and meaning through remorse and forgiveness of the injured party, underlines the importance of remorse and forgiveness in the Samoan equation of peace and harmony between the victim and the offended.

Person to Self: In the harmony between person and self it is acknowledged that human beings are self-reflective beings. Human intelligence and wisdom transpires as much through self-reflection and personal experience as by objective analyses or peer and elder mentoring. Self-reflection through *anapogi* or fasting, *tatalo* or meditation, and *moe manatunatu* or dream dialogue with the divine, are methods for gaining perspective on the harmony between a person and their inner self.¹⁶ The capacity to exercise introspection and the willingness to learn more about our fundamental nature, purpose, and essence leads into further inquiry into the human condition and the essence of human kind as a whole.

According to HC Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese Tupuola Efi, there are three key parts to the self: the *tino* or body, the *mafaufau* or mind and the *agaga* or soul.¹⁷ Harmony

¹⁶ My mother often tells about how she does not own an alarm clock, but *moe manatu* her day the night before, such that she wakes up in time for her daily activities. She often considers this part of her sleep as real, as it has served as her built in “alarm clock” as long as she can remember.

¹⁷ Most of these ideas came from a conversation with HC Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese Tupuola Efi at the Samoan Language Conference in American Samoa in the Summer of 2005. HC Tuiatua also presented a paper during the conference titled: *Ina Ne'i Vale Tu'ulima lo ta Tofi- That we might misplace our*

within the self requires harmony in the body, the mind and the soul. For Samoans, harmony in the body is crucial because it determines how well people engage in survival tasks such as planting, hunting, fishing, cooking, sex, play, martial arts, and other physical activities. A harmonious body is therefore one that exhibits physical dexterity and symmetry and enables sexual and reproductive prowess. Beauty and harmony in the body is a reflection of paying attention to the disciplines of physical exercise and dietary control. The Samoan saying, '*e le soona ai Tamaalii*' meaning 'a Chief does not eat without regard'¹⁸ alludes to the importance of dietary discipline to achieving harmony in the body. This tradition in the Samoan community, of watching what one eats, in addition to other relationship building activities, I believe, is the key to reducing obesity in our community.

Harmony in the mind involves finding unity in the messages conveyed by the senses, as well as the messages conveyed by the soul to the mind. The perceptions perceived through the senses, is communicated to the brain and made sense of by the mind. It is the function of the mind to assess sensory evidence for cognitive meaning and communicating this meaning to the soul. A consistent message will result in harmony. The function and purpose of the mind is to discern evidence and make good judgments. While the mind absorbs and receives sensory perceptions, the soul takes in and relates to extrasensory perceptions. To establish proper *va* between the mind and the soul requires that both exist in harmony.

heritage During our informal interview, HC Tuiatua shared his passion for the *fa'a-Samoa*, and his innate desire to share it with the rest of the world.

¹⁸ This is one of many possible translations of dietary intake. Others translations include “a chief makes sure that others are fed before he eats” or “a chief eats accordingly.” The main idea is that a chief is always responsible for other issues pertaining to the clan, and that eating is perhaps the very last thing on his mind.

The *mauli* or soul, resides between the *fatu* or heart and the *mama* or lungs. The significance of this is that the heart represents God as the prime mover, who provides rhythm and life to the mind and body, while the lungs are the custodians of the breath of life. When a chief blesses his successor, he breathes his *fa'amanuiaga* or blessing into his successor's open mouth. Moreover, when two people greet in embrace, cheek to cheek, they will breathe in through their noses the *mana*, spirit of the other. Samoans call this *sogi*.¹⁹ The spiritual contents of the chief's blessing and the breathed-in *mana* of the *sogi*, travel first to the lungs, the custodians of the breath of life, then to other parts of the body and mind. While the heart pumps blood throughout the body, the lungs provide oxygen to facilitate the work of the heart. Together they give life to the body and mind. This begs the question: How does one nurture the soul? According to HC Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese Tupuola Efi, it is done through *anapogi* or fasting, *tatalo* or meditation, and *moe manatunatu*, or dream dialogue with the divine. Through the *anapogi*, *tatalo* and *moe manatunatu*, the soul is fed. This process of discernment invites self-reflection and re-assessment, not only of the contexts of today, but of yesterday and tomorrow. Spiritual insight assists in the achievement of mental and physical harmony. Through the harmonies of body, mind and soul, the self searches and achieves levels of spiritual harmony and personal peace.

In the search for peace, the harmonies between persons and God, persons and the environment, between person and self, is indicative of a person's continual search for the

¹⁹ When interviewees were asked in several settings what *sogi* means, responses ranges from kissing (75%), to smelling (15%) to cutting with a sharp knife (10%). But in the beginning *sogi* is the breathing in of another's spirit in greeting. *Sogi* as a verb is what the nose does and not the lips.

ultimate harmony. The searching rather than the finding of these harmonies gives emphasis, purpose and meaning to the self and to life itself.

Persons and Environment

The way in which Samoans draw links between persons and the earthly environment and how they relate to creation is through equality. Ostensibly there is a *va* between persons and the environment and for harmony to exist between the two, there must be mutual acceptance of the boundaries and codes that govern and maintain this *va*. There are many Samoan proverbs which speak to the sacred significance of the relationships among humans, plant life and the animal kingdom. Many Samoan terms still exist today that continues to bond persons and the environment in deeply spiritual ways. As an example, the Samoan terms *eleele*, meaning earth, and *palapala*, meaning soil, are also the words for blood, underscoring the intricate relations between life, signified by blood and the environment, signified by earth. The Samoan term *fatu* means rock in Samoan, but is also the term given to the heart. Again here is evidence of a strong relationship between persons and their environment. The term *fanua* means placenta and it also means land. Again this word connects human life to the environment such that any differences rest in the interpretation, which is mediated in community and according to the context.

In the indigenous Samoan religion it was crucial that before a tree was cut that *faalanu*, or a prayer chant, was performed. The chant sought the god of the forest's pardon for taking the life of the tree or any of its member parts. In the village of Asau, Savai'i renowned for its building guilds, such prayer chants were commonly performed.

When cutting a tree the word used to describe the cutting is *oia*, which derives from the word *oi*, a cry in pain. This presupposes that a tree suffers pain when cut down. The prayer chant therefore also seeks forgiveness from the tree for having caused it pain.

In ancient Samoa, protocols were developed to ensure that the environment was preserved. During times of re-growth, certain trees and plants were prohibited from being cut or picked. These protocols and *tapu* associated with them provided a conservation plan that dictated what humans could take from the environment, when and how much. Such plans take into account the communal needs of all stakeholders rather than just the profit for the business holders. In this context the taking of natural resources was never to go beyond what nature herself could sustain in natural re-growth. Tasks associated with fishing, planting, harvesting and building were therefore coordinated in accordance with predetermined cosmic and environmental timing. The contribution of plant and animal life to ensuring the survival of humans on earth is divine. The onset of natural disasters currently experienced in the world can be understood in ancient Samoan terms as the gods attempting to restore balance and harmony between humans and nature.²⁰ All this to say that, paying close attention to the various relationships is necessary for community building and organizing in the Samoan community in the diaspora. With this additional information, on how important relationships are to Samoans, we now turn to a particular way the Samoan community comes together and is organized in the diaspora.

²⁰ The rising of a fish called the *atule* is such a display of the balance between human endeavors and nature. This communal event has many protocols that have developed over the years to ensure that the fish is given the dignity it deserves. The only village in Samoa that still treats the *atule* in this manner is Ofu, Manu'a. A recent rising of the *atule* in Ofu, Manu'a was captured on the video "Lau Atule i Ofu, Manu'a American Samoa," directed by Michael Wysong of the University of Hawaii and produced by the American Samoa Community College, March 24, 2001.

Tafesilafai

Tafesilafa'i is what the annual festival is called; it is a conversation that brings together Samoan youth to fellowship, sharing and partaking in their culture, and to build community. The festival is a process through which persons can become empowered to affect positive changes in their community. The term empowerment has achieved widespread scholarly and popular usage, ranging from policy research to political slogans to advertising campaigns. But the concept of empowerment has become ubiquitous in part because there are a large number of contexts in which empowerment is thought to occur. From the research, we have discovered that empowerment may well need to be considered on a context specific basis. The context from which our examination of empowerment flows is a youth competition to see who has the best attire, sings the best, recites the best speech, and dances the best dance. A qualitative analysis, specifically grounded theory and narrative inquiry methodology, was used to gather data, and our analysis was made possible by participation and collaboration with Samoan communities which opened the way for access to documents, events, interviews, and settings that formed the basis of the study.

When the thought of gathering the community first came up, the issue was a location large enough to accommodate more than three youth groups. With new immigrants as members, most Samoan churches did not own their own property and the ones that do are small and ill equipped to accommodate large crowds. Second Samoan of Long Beach purchased a building that accommodates over 800 persons; so we decided to take this project on as a ministry of our Church. We used the sanctuary for worship

services and the parking lot for the dances. It was 1997, and this was a new attempt at gathering a people; the first festival was well attended. We had five youth groups in attendance. Our neighbors came out of curiosity to observe and stayed for the entertainment and the food. The second year of the festival, the neighborhood was enraged; we had so many visitors that year and in anticipation of this, we took out a special events permit to block the street in front of our sanctuary for the Festival. Apparently the neighbors did not appreciate this. We knew then that the Festival has outgrown our sanctuary and parking lot.

Because we were forced to take the Festival outside our church grounds, new issues now came up: funding, tents, chairs, and portable toilets. Another issue was that youth groups were not comfortable with the idea of “performing” in public, especially out in the open, exposed to the dominant society. For Samoan groups, culture is sacred, personal, and much too important to be trivialized by displaying it in public, open to inspection, ridicule, and critics. They did not see downtown Long Beach in the middle of the tourist scene as a safe place to display their “native-ness”. The Queen Mary Park was not viewed as a friendly alternative to the Church grounds. The year 1999 was the first time our youth were asked to perform in a public venue. When asked: What is it about the Queen Mary Park that is a challenge? Responses invariably pointed to a perception that the Queen Mary Park venue was too “palagi,” too “up-scale,” too “un-ethnic,” outside their reach, and too pricey for their taste. Frankly it was very intimidating to hold a festival in the middle of Long Beach. In 1999, our first year in a public venue, we had only two youth groups participating, needless to say it was sparsely attended.

We negotiated hard with the managers of the City owned Queen Mary Park, and we got our foot in the door by promising to make it a lucrative partnership for them eventually. In response to the funding issue we decided to sell booth space to help pay for some of our expenses. Selling booth space also came with its own unique challenges but opened our youth to the idea of commerce and vending, something that has been left generally to non-Samoan merchants.

Over the years reactions have come in suggesting that the Festival is taking root in the community and now eleven years after the festival began and eight years since it was moved to a public place, the Samoan communities now feel safe enough to come, share their narratives in public, participate in community wide issues, and just hang out. The Samoan community is beginning to see, and the dominant community is beginning to accept, that Tafesilafa'i is part of that necessary justice mechanism for the voiceless to find their voice. We have utilized the Festival to survey the community and to promote justice issues in the greater Long Beach community. *Tafesilafa'i* is now a separate organization with its own governing board with four members from Second Samoan Congregational UCC and the remaining eight drawn from the community at large. In addition to populating a community wide board, Tafesilafa'i has left markers along the way that lift up our small successes in different circles in the dominant community. In past years Tafesilafa'i has partnered with community groups to promote voter registration; the Samoan community has advocated for changes in immigration laws, and lifted up universal healthcare for all. The Festival is now a no-alcohol, no-smoking, family friendly event. The Samoan community took a small leap and sponsored a piece of legislation in Sacramento; the Samoan community has a strong presence in the art

community; the Samoan community is a vocal advocate of social justice and collaborating with other churches were instrumental in getting the first year round homeless shelter in the City of Long Beach. Slowly the Samoan community is finding its voice and is beginning to affect the dominant culture, but the struggle to remain a specific culture and to be in solidarity with others who share the same language, cosmogony, and values goes on, leading us to the role that languages, motifs, proverbs, and rubrics play in keeping our culture intact.

Alagaupu – Proverbs: Each Tafesilafa'i has a Samoan proverb as its theme. Part of the conversation and preparation that is done three to four months leading up to the Festival is taking this proverb and exegeting it in the context of the diaspora. Pastors preach sermons about it; a television program is devoted to working out the truth that is in the proverb; and a conscious effort is made to see how it can be applied here for the common good. "Path of words" is the literal translation of the term *alagaupu*. It suggests that words cut a path or provide a road upon which to travel. As such, what words do for Samoans, is gives direction. When a particularity is observed over and over, and a truth is extracted from this particularity, an attempt is usually made to integrate this truth into community and to extend it to other particularities of facts or instances. When done properly and, when tested, found to be valid, then a group of words becomes an *alagaupu*. These integrations serve as mental abstractions, and the process omits particular details of the instances and integrates these proverbs based on a set of criteria that is communally mediated. Proverbs allow generalization from one context to another context. Each festival adopts an *alagaupu* as the central theme that contains a truth about

the Samoan reality and each dance, rhetoric, essay, costumes, and song offered by the participants is to define, refine, display, unpack, witness, explain, and add to the understanding of this theme. Because these themes are highly abstracted, in that there is no reference to how the proverb came about, what happened, where the event occurred or what were the particularities, youth groups get very creative in unpacking these treasures and it is all fun.

Tafesilafa'i 2004's theme "*Ina Ne'i Sili le Ta'i i le Tapua'i*" "*that you would consider performance more important than prayer*" cautions the youth not to favor performance over discernment. In a year which saw the leadership of our country accused of being trigger happy, and the administration's reaction to events of September 11 characterized as rushing to war, this theme was appropriate in encouraging the youth to be more thoughtful and prayerful than act-ful. These abstractions can be so powerful and the songs, rhetoric, essays, attires, dances so colorful and creative that the performances have come to signify life. As the youth groups try to unpack the proverbs, they are forced to think critically and to come to some realization of the indigenous self, respecting that self when everyone seemed disinterested and still others tend to dismiss that self as unimportant altogether.

While the Festival is a celebration, there were hurdles that youth had to overcome at their local youth groups level in order to get to the Festival. Some were personal hurdles, others were family hurdles and still others were systemic. Each youth has to have three or four changes of performance attires, which are all custom tailored (you can't go to Wal-Mart and buy it off the rack); this is quite an investment of resources. In most cases uniforms are purchased from collective funds; in some cases the young

persons are burdened with securing their own uniforms. Each youth group has to meet for at least three months, and in some cases longer, before the festival to practice the dances; the songs and the leaders have to come up with creative ideas for unpacking the theme, teaching the kids while maintaining their sanity. There is a lot of sacrifice that goes into preparation for the Festival, and this preparation leads us to some of the issues confronting our community in diaspora.

Community Issues

Economics: One of the challenges that we encounter in funding our cultural programs is the dearth of an economic base from which to draw. Most parents are too busy trying to keep a roof over their heads, putting food on the table, and holding down multiple jobs just to make ends meet. They are not able to fund raise for these cultural programs. It is this condition that makes it difficult for folks to slow down, reflect on their situations, and critically think about their ways of life. Recent immigrants remain preoccupied with immigration issues, finding affordable housing, and landing a decent job; the last thing on their mind is preserving their language and culture. There are very few Samoan businesses in the community, and very few merchants to provide economic capital for community based programs. My research has shown that the businesses do not see their individual goals furthered by supporting a “traditional” Samoan community, so the economic capital that does exist in the community flows elsewhere. This poses the greatest challenge to the task of community building, organizing and gathering an immigrant people in the diaspora. It is what Zhou and Bakston refer to as negative consequences of traditionalism which is the “unquestioning acceptance of the status quo

and stifled individualism.”²¹ Tafesilafa’I has to find a way to make cultural preservation a viable option for rapid economic advancement.²²

Spirituality: The research for this dissertation has shown that Samoans are not spending time getting in touch with the spiritual, discerning the holy, pondering the *va*. As Samoans were - using the language of process - lured into creation as spiritual beings, this lack of attention to things spiritual will eventually take its toll on the collective psyche of the Samoan community. We may see the community disintegrate due to a drifting away from what is an integral part of who Samoans are. I received a call from a young person in our community. She was rushing to get information about a program we have and asked if I think she qualifies. I told her I don’t know if this is right for you, but let’s get together. Of course she was too busy, did not have her planner with her, and thought perhaps it was not quite appropriate for her to participate at this time. I sensed a disturbance in her spirit, and I tried to slow her down by asking her to come down and talk but, alas, the physical world of the dominant culture, the urgency of the presentational immediate data, has convinced her that the world we live in and see is more important than the spiritual and unseen world. In their relationships, the youth do not take time to think, to reflect, and to meditate on things spiritual.

²¹ Zhou and Bankston, Growing Up American, 20.

²² Levitt and Waters, eds. Changing Face of Home, 2

Health: Samoans have a higher rate of obesity per capita than any other ethnicity.²³ Our people are getting sick from eating pre-packaged food that are several processes removed from the source. Samoans are dying of cancer, high blood pressure and diabetes, due to a sedentary lifestyle in the States and they are not in an environment that promotes healthy living. To complicate matters Samoans do not have sufficient healthcare coverage to provide the health maintenance education required to combat these diseases. In addition Samoans do not have access to space where they can grow their gardens, plant trees, and cultivate the land, which in the past was one source of daily exercise.

Values: It is clear that there seems to be a lack of purposeful action in the Samoan community when it comes to issues that require engaging those in power. An example is the affordable housing challenge now facing communities all around, and especially the Samoan community. In an attempt to develop the lot next to our sanctuary for affordable housing, the Samoan community has run into some dissonance with the historical preservationist in the neighborhood. This group consists of a few activists who have the ear of the local councilperson, and so affect policies in the city. Indigenous Samoan values puts the responsibility for addressing all members of the community squarely on the shoulders of those in power, expecting them to make sure that everyone has a voice. Why? Perhaps it is because of how they were socialized, perhaps it has something to do with colonialism or perhaps the Samoan community needs to be educated. In any case, because Samoans have emerged as relational beings, they value good relations, respect,

²³ This came from a conversation with Dr. Salei'a Afele-Faamuli a program officer at the United States Department of Agriculture in Washington DC. Tafesilafa'i looked at ways to combat obesity in the Samoan community and submitted a grant proposal that was not selected for funding.

peace, tolerance, and inclusiveness; the *modus operandi* are usually harmony, tranquility, consensus, and non-confrontational. These traits often put Samoans at a disadvantage within the chaotic, turbulent and confrontational method of getting things done in a western society. One of my colleagues told me the other day that in western society it is the squeaky wheel that gets the grease. In the Samoan community, the squeaky wheel gets replaced. In the community where Samoans live and work, folks are unorganized, scattered, fragmented, each pursuing their own goals. Relationships are peripheral, and most every encounter is transactional, with no other attachments or long-term connections to the rest of the community. This may be due to the fact that the community is transient. There are more renters than homeowners within an ever increasing rental market situation; nonetheless, in this context Tafesilafa'i is charged with organizing and building community.

Language: Acquisition of the dominant culture's language is necessary to survive in this new environment. Everything from getting your driver's license, to getting a job, to getting electric power turned on, requires that you speak and write in English. In addition to this reality in diaspora, there is a colonialist mentality in the Samoan community that the language of the *palagis* or white person is superior to that of the Samoan language. This implies that those who do not speak English must be inferior. At the boarding school I attended, speaking Samoan was a punishable offense. Parents are known to encourage their children to practice speaking English so the children can find better jobs in the United States. This is done at the expense of our indigenous Samoan language; continuing along this road will eventually erode our community and our identity.

While most Samoans use the English language for discourse and normal conversations, many are not fluent to the point where they can be bold in engaging the powers effectively. A recent incident where the Los Angeles Unified School District selected a Samoan Church site to be taken via eminent domain for a new public school, was very telling. Members of the Samoan community, who were willing to engage the powers and who did show up during the town hall meetings to protest this action, were quite emotional in their use of the English language. At the town hall meeting, we were fewer in numbers, less structured in our arguments, repetitive, and emotional in our delivery and the authorities were not moved. If it weren't for raising the constitutionality of this action, given the separation of Church and state, an issue that is a given with religious sites, the authorities would not have listened. It was clear that a school must be built in the community and those in powers were looking for a location whose residents would not put up any defense against eminent domain. From this incident we can surmise that language acquisition, use, and development are a must to fully engage the powers in the diaspora. A corollary of literacy is that to the extent that the Samoan indigenous language is acquired, used and developed, the Samoan community will be sustained, the culture will be preserved, and their unique contribution to the larger community ensured.

In a recent court case where one of our elders filed a request for a temporary restraining order against another person, the elder found that requesting a translator acted as a buffer and created a *va* so that the case was heard and she felt that she had voice. Though the request was ultimately denied, the elder felt that justice was served and that she could have been more understanding of the defendant. While newer immigrants can

depend on their relatives who have been here a while, for communications in English, the immigrant should not want to continue this too long, as this will put a strain on family ties and relationships.

Education: Samoans have a high school drop out rate in the diaspora, and of this we are not proud of; the education system is not working for our children. Since our children learn in community and in relationships, building strong relationships among students, parents, teachers, and other stakeholders is a must. Class size has to be kept at a level where the teacher knows the students by name and spend quality time with them so relationships are properly honed and nurtured, thus building a healthy learning community.

Art as a Metaphor

Some of our Samoan knowledge, motifs, integrations, and mental abstractions are found in our art forms. In the winter of 2003 a partnership was forged by Tafesilafa'i with the Samoan and Pacific Studies Department of the American Samoa Community College in establishing an Artist in Residence program leading up to the Tafesilafa'i Festival. We established the program in 2004 and brought two carvers from Samoa; for three months we watched them carve, had them teach carving classes, invited them to do artist's receptions in the community, and introduced our students to the art world of carving.

The Samoan community embraced the carving as something both novel and yet familiar in their worldview and understanding of who we are. The Artist in Residence

program was widely accepted by the greater community in Long Beach, and the Festival got great publicity, further locating our community in the midst of this pluralistic cultural mosaic that is Southern California. The two carvers were interviewed extensively about their understanding of Samoan art forms; both carvers lived with us in community, further exposing them to the Samoan Community in the States and allowing the community to gain first hand access to their craft and skills set.

Who is transmitting knowledge? The two carvers were a master carver and his apprentice. The master carver is world-renowned carver Sven Ortquist who is a national treasure in Samoa; his apprentice was Patrick Mafo'e, a second year art student at ASCC. Mr. Ortquist does not have a formal education, but started his trade at age nine when he was exiled to the Island of Magonai in Fiji after contracting Hansen's disease or leprosy. The Samoan community in the diaspora was very impressed with the work that the students did with Sven, and ended up carving two life-size Samoan canoes out of Canadian pine. The knowledge of Samoan motifs was used extensively in the Islands for survival; for instance, canoes were utility vessels used in fishing and in sustaining life. While canoes are seldom used for fishing anymore, the motif of a vessel created from things in the environment to sustain life can still be used and perhaps such contextualized vehicles can serve as contemporary canoes utilized in maintaining and preserving life. Though the knowledge of canoe carving is somewhat obsolete, building a vehicle or repairing existing vehicles may be a close approximation of the kind of knowledge required in the diaspora to survive.

Who decides what knowledge to transmit? In the Samoan context, the decision is made communally within certain restrictive parameters. After looking closer at some of

the formative pieces in our language and culture, the Director of the *Tafesilafai Festival* decided that an Artist in Residence program would complement our efforts to gather the community well. We decided to reach out to the Community College, as they are the most advanced educational institution in American Samoa. Out of respect, and in consideration of the *va*, HC Pule Tuiasosopo was given the decision to select an Artist for the program. HC Pule is the Director of the Department and is Sven's supervisor and friend. It was Sven's respect for the community that gave the community control of the place of instruction, the method of instruction, and the curriculum. Because the program transpired the way it did, there were several insights gained from the Artist in Residence program. The first one is that the *tufuga* or the master must be the one that provides leadership during the carving. Theoretically a master carver can be both a male and female; however, most carvers are male, and many have had the time to hone their skills over time. The master carver is not necessarily the strongest, or the smartest, or the one with the loudest voice but is the designated person to whom everyone listens. The master is the professional brought from Samoa, has the reputation, and has proven to be worthy of emulating. Secondly, there cannot be more than one *tufuga* at a site. The idea of consensus building or team leadership, according to our research, does not work well in canoe carving. The *tufuga* or master carver has a certain picture of the end product in mind and participants are invited to bring that vision about. Thirdly, the *tufuga* has to be present at all times. The *tufuga* was usually the first one to arrive at work and the last one to leave. During the course of the program, Sven was hospitalized for two weeks, and the entire job came to a halt. The carvers knew that Sven was in the hospital; they did not

see any reason to continue; they stopped coming for they did not want to mess up the canoes. The carvers were respectful of Sven and did not want to usurp his leadership.

Role of the learner: The learners were, in this case, obedient and respectful. Their role was to please the *tufuga* and tend to Sven's wishes. In the *va* between the teacher and the learner, there was an enormous responsibility on Sven to teach well and to keep his students motivated. Reflecting on this interaction, I can't help but feel that this may be a subservient role birthed in colonialism, and that Samoans were so badly oppressed that they are deep in denial, but just observing the learners, their coming to the work place each morning, their conversations, their laughter, their support of the project, and how the women began to cook for the volunteer carvers, which were mostly men and children. I am very sure that they did not consider this work but sheer pleasure. Perhaps knowing that this situation would only last until the canoe was done, then it would be off to another project, helped in keeping energies up and spirits high.

Role of the teacher: The teacher had to get the canoes carved with the least amount of effort and the most amount of fun in preparation for the Tafesilafa'i. However, a more overarching goal, and one that supports the thesis of this dissertation, is getting the community built up so that care and compassion can be experienced throughout one's lifetime. Conversations around the tent where the canoes were carved revolved around the days of the Festival and fears that the canoe may not float. All this effort was building community and gathering a Samoan community that thought little about coming together to learn.

Because Samoans locate their lives communally, their knowledge is also contained communally; Samoans learn communally, teach communally, and survive communally. With the onslaught of Western style thinking, such community is often seen as primitive, antiquated and impinging on the individual pursuit of happiness. As members of a traditionally communal society come in contact with western thinking, such member are put at a disadvantage. Why? Because there are so many ways in which the western style knowledge and thinking is seen as “better” than that acquired communally. Western style thinking is prevalent in how the economic system works, in how we educate and in how so much of the world seems to be rigged at making communal thinking and being as “less than” dominant western thinking.

Samoans have so much knowledge in our community that when that knowledge is “packaged” properly it can be of value to someone, somewhere, somehow, sometime. How do we propose to package it? We can name the different pieces, calling them what they are in Samoan and then explaining what they mean, their original context, how they were applied in the past and how they might be used today and how they can be beneficial in constructing a peaceful tomorrow. When packaging our knowledge, we must engage the powers that be to allow them to see that this way of thinking is not hostile to the dominant thought patterns and how the *fa'a-Samoa* can actually accentuate and augment western style thinking. To think that only one or the other must exist is a very modern thought that has proven less than appropriate in our lives in these postmodern times. This paradigm provides an option to the either-or option so that we can now have particularity without exclusivity. This creates the space for more than one thought or one community interest at the same time. Using the language of economics,

the holding of two styles in tension would be a departure from economies of scarcity, where there are only a limited number of ideas and styles that can work, oblivious to other ideas and events that are closely intertwined. The will of the Samoan community is that the knowledge contained in the community should be packaged and given a western spin so as to make a valuable contribution to the dominant western world.²⁴

From our work and research in the community, we have convinced many in the diasporic community of the importance of having one's own indigenous vernacular to begin the work of re-building their communities in diaspora. It is a means for constructing a counter-hegemonic defense against the dominant onslaught. Without a medium of exchange that is uniquely Samoan, it is difficult to negotiate for our own community. Samoans should have the power to get away from the dominant culture and the confines of the dominant languages to one particularly that is particularly Samoan:

O le masani a tulafale o le Atunu'u, e fa'asenanui a latou tala ina ia leai ai se isi e malamalama ia latou upu. E leai lava se tulafale ua ou fesili iai, ua latou mafai ona ta'u mai ai le uiga o le alaga upu – "Ua taliga e fia logo le alaga a Uoleiua, ina ua nota ai fatuga nai sita."

From our Samoan space we can then, with strength, make our contributions meet our own fel needs in the dominant context.

Pedagogically, reading the previous paragraph should encourage those not in the know to think of this moment of not understanding as an opportunity to learn.²⁵ We will not be able to define, name, and reconfigure our identity without complete command of

²⁴ This was gleaned from the research as the Tafesilafa'I Festival began to caught on in the community. This newer challenge is outside the scope of this paper, but is a reality that needs to be pursued.

²⁵ bell hooks, Teaching to Transgress, 172

our own language. We are going to communicate anyway, why not use a language that speaks to our *mauli* or innermost being. Why not use a language that we hear all around us? We live it and it is part of what the world has assigned to us as where we can make our most effective contribution. The Samoan language is a non-negotiable as a medium of exchange and a place of beginning for the *fa'a-Samoa* to thrive and contribute.

Finally, the materiality of the Samoan culture is another issue that needs to be addressed in community building and organizing. When the extended family gathers during life-cycle events, the culture and what gets perceived in the causal efficacy mode, is what represents the materiality of the Samoan culture. This of course was once extracted from the environment in Samoa and thus it runs with the land; but when the culture is transported to another context, the physicality will change and the material culture will be modified, but the meaning of these symbols are non-negotiable and will need to remain the same. It is without question that without the help of the educators in putting these symbols of values into language, a people and a culture may be lost. The next chapter talks about action items and reflection on Tafesilafa'i.

Summary

We began this chapter with a definition of community building and organizing as applicable to the research and how it has taken form in the Samoan community with regards to the Tafesilafa'i conversations. The concept of the *va* is further deepened, grounding the *va* in the relationship between persons and God, between persons, between persons and the environment. Finally, the Tafesilafa'i festival was examined under the rubric of community building and organizing, further grounding the research question of

Samoan epistemology in the diaspora. Tafesilafa'i was also analyzed using educational lenses to determine an appropriate pedagogy for educating Samoan students and a resulting curriculum that is not hostile to the *fa'a-Samoa* and yet equip the learner to survive in the diaspora. This leads us to the next chapter which takes what we have developed, the Tafesilafa'i scaffolding and utilize it for the purpose of affecting changes, solving problems and setting the agenda in the community through actions and reflections.

CHAPTER 6

Action and Reflection: Theo-Socio-Economic Scaffolding

“...when a community loses its memory, its members no longer know one another.... If they do not know one another’s stories, how can they know whether or not to trust one another? People who do not trust one another do not help one another, and moreover they fear one another.”¹

This chapter highlights some of the insights gained from the research, as well as some of the possible alternatives and implications for certain constructs – theological, social and economical. This chapter draws from a rich repertoire of raw data collected over ten years from both the diasporic Samoan community and the Samoan community in the islands. Sprinkled in between the theo-socio-economic scaffolding are some reflections on the data in relations to other theories of coming to know. The last portion of this chapter outlines the Tafesilafa’i curriculum. It is an attempt at taking data from the research and putting it into practice such that transformation occurs in the community. The curriculum is refined, tested, and reconstituted in community while being implemented.

The Tafesilafa’i curriculum is unique in that it is a conversation, with the participants’ and the leaders’ lived experience serving as the only text. The curriculum is an organic way of relating to the world and to others on the basis that we are all connected in some basic fundamental way. When a community is conscious or “in the

¹ Wendell Berry, The Work of Local Culture: What Are People For? (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990), 157-158.

know,” transformation of persons, structures, and environment occurs continuously as a life giving process in community towards God’s initial aim or the common good.

Theological Implications

To suggest that God is somehow fundamentally connected to everyone, more so than the God that was brought to the Islands by western missionaries in 1830, is to suggest a not-so-removed and, in opposition to the *tyrant* ideal of power, a not-so-powerful God. To suggest that God is kin to us and experiences human traits is to suggest that God is less than omnipotent – omnipotent meaning, the coercive, unilateral power to determine and decide every detail of what happens in the world. This is how power is viewed by many; which is why people today still ask, when catastrophe strikes, Why did God do this to us? If God is an all powerful and all knowing God, if God determines and decides every detail of what happens to us, why this? Charles Hartshorne refers to this line of questioning as absurd and charges theologians with the responsibility of creating this improper line of questioning.² When the tyrant ideal of power was readily accepted by Samoans when introduced to the islands during the early 19th century, it was not without good reason. The promise of peace that the missionaries’ technology brought with them was quite convincing; the way Samoans were being in the world was disconnected from the divine, before the arrival of the missionaries, and thus was not working, and their basic worldview of God as a loving God worthy of worship supported acceptance of this new religion.³ Into that context comes the idea as voiced by Aristotle:

² Hartshorne, Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes, 10-11.

God is mover of all things, unmoved by any, and the Samoans accepted it together with the stainless steel machetes.

The Tafesilafa'i conversation is about revisiting this juncture in light of the diasporic challenges facing Samoans. Tafesilafa'i is about a Samoan metaphysics, and an "a priori statement about existence," a study of those general principles which are necessarily true of any state of affairs regardless of circumstances; Tafesilafa'i contextualizes this narrative in the diaspora for the purpose of survival, well-being, enjoyment, and harmony. Process theology and Whiteheadian thought as modified by Charles Hartshorne most closely mirrors that of the *fa'a-Samoa* way of life. The classical view of God, as without real emotions, or sensitivity to the feelings of others, is in tension with the Samoan indigenous view of God as progenitor, a participant in the *va* between us and in that sense one of us. The classical view of God as wholly active in creation rather than passive seems such a clear formula, until you define active as not getting emotionally involved with creation; then it becomes an absurd formula.⁴ In the Samoan context you cannot love without getting emotionally involved, and this idea about love finds its roots in indigenous narratives as well as biblical narratives. The task of revisiting this dialogue and generating newer glimpses of glory for the diasporic community is what Tafesilafa'i is engaged in.

³ According to Rev. Elder Feu'u Hosea of South San Francisco, CA in an interview during Tafesilafa'i 2001, one of the reasons why Samoan leaders accepted Christianity so readily was because of the stainless steel machetes. This technology was revolutionary at the time and it allowed the land to be cleared quickly for more crops. The leaders said to each other "if the palagi's God gave him this, then that is the God for me and my people."

⁴ Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes*, 39.

In taking a more rational approach to a process view of God, Hartshorne developed a dipolar view of God — the mental pole which Hartshorne calls the “abstract nature”⁵ of God and the consequent pole which he calls the “concrete nature”⁶ of God. God’s character through eternity is contained in the abstract; God participating in actual existence in any given state, with all the accumulated values of the world up to that moment in time is contained in the concrete. The attributes of God’s abstract nature are those divine qualities that are eternally and necessarily true of God regardless of circumstances; this is the immutability aspect of God; in the Samoan worldview, it is beyond *lagi tua iva*;⁷ the ancestors, stories, and indigenous narratives occupy this space. Samoans refer to this unchanging nature of God as the *sa* in Samoa. It is the place where what you-don’t-know that you-don’t-know exists. The concrete nature of God, according to Hartshorne, is God’s interaction with the world in accordance with the circumstances. God in the concrete actuality is a “living person,” in process and kin to us; God’s life consists of an everlasting succession of divine events or occasions. The dipolar nature of God, according to Hartshorne, therefore means that God is necessary according to the divine’s abstract nature, but contingent according to the divine’s concrete nature; independent in the divine’s abstract nature, but dependent in the divine’s concrete nature. God is independent in the sense that nothing can threaten the divine’s existence or cause God to cease acting according to God’s loving and righteous character; but God is also dependent in that what the creatures do impacts God’s response, feelings, and content of

⁵ Ibid., 9

⁶ Ibid., 46-49

⁷ *Lagi tua iva*, translates the ninth heaven. Beyond the ninth heaven is the dwelling place of the Samoan god Tagaloa.

divine life. In the *fa'a-Samoa* where the *va* is richly developed and discerned in community, there is a strong presence of these natures of God in operation in the community. During life cycle events where the *fa'a-Samoa* is markedly evidenced in community, there is a sense of peace that comes over the community, as the scene is set for worship. The Tafesilafa'i conversation attempts to be a clearing where participants have access to their heritage and traditions, so that they are empowered to contribute to the world at large; but more important, so that the conversation of what God is doing in the world may not be seen exclusively in terms of absoluteness, necessity, independence, and infinity but wholly in contrast to the relativity, contingency, dependence, and finitude of the creatures.

Classical theism has resulted in such problems as the contradiction of God's necessary knowledge of a contingent world. This idea, for the Samoan community, has created a clear and unbiblical bifurcation between the spiritual and the secular realm, with one having no connection with the other. While the business activities come to a halt on Sunday in celebration of God, injustice rages on in commerce during the week. The bifurcation between the spiritual and the secular also limits God's timeless act of creating and governing the world to just church matters with little attention to the good that the church can do in the world when choosing to do so. Hartshorne contends that if temporal process and creativity are ultimately real, the divine self must be in process in some sense and must be dependent upon the free decisions of the creatures. Hartshorne works out this notion in his section about God having sympathy and feeling for others' feelings.⁸ God, according to Samoans, is more than just the world in its totality, because God has a

⁸ Ibid 27-32.

transcendent self that lives in the ninth heaven, according to mythological tales, but has knowledge and love of the world that God created. In this sense the Samoan view of God is panentheistic – all things are in God. God continues to be unsurpassable in social relatedness and in this sense is perfect: feeling perfect love and sympathetic understanding of every creature and responding appropriately perfect to every creature in every event. In the construct of Hartshorne – God’s abstract nature is supremely absolute, and God’s concrete nature supremely relative. No one can surpass God in the completeness of social relatedness to every creature. But God can be self surpassing; that is, God can “grow” in joy and feeling of the world, in knowledge of actual events and what happens in the world. In Samoan cosmogony every time God “grows” a *va* is created and begs to be respected, acknowledged and loved.

In developing the Tafesilafa’i curriculum there was an underlying notion of perfection or “achieving the ultimate *va*” that fueled our efforts of gathering the community. There was an ultimate ideal that we were striving for; though individually we did not know what that idea is and had no way of recognizing it should it emerge. However, we trusted there was divine memory that left God’s thumbprint on our lives when we gathered, and with determination, resolve, and hard work we were destined to uncover this ultimate ideal. Applying the lenses of process theology to our data, we were able to overcome the objection of classical theists to “perfection” as something that cannot be consistently defined. Using Hartshorne’s argument for perfection or “most perfect being” as either existing necessarily or necessarily non-existent, we came to the conclusion that the perfection in reality exists necessarily and therefore does not need to be proved. Perfection, if it really is perfection, exists necessarily as the logically required

ground of all existence and thought.⁹ Similar to the efforts of Hartshorne, Tafesilafa'i attempts to make the concept of perfection rationally conceivable and, in a sense, is importing ontological distinctions to the Samoan community in the diaspora. These distinctions are worked out in the Tafesilafa'i curriculum later.

Social Implications

It is clear that the breakdown of the extended family in our society is hugely responsible for much of the social ills that we are experiencing. Within diasporic communities it is the breakdown of indigenous ways of relating that are allowing the breakdowns in the larger society to slowly erode the indigenous quality of life and sense of well being. In essence, people are living increasingly in isolation from their neighbors in every town and city in the United States. The effect of this is a deep sense of powerlessness, distrust, and hopelessness in the face of inordinate pressures on families in our communities. The pressures range from stagnating wages and declining purchasing power and living standards for a majority of Americans, to an increase in extra time at work each year that the average American must work to maintain those wages; to such problems as youth violence, lack of affordable housing, teen pregnancy, school dropouts, abusive social networking, and crime. The diasporic Samoan community is further burdened with negotiating cultural differences, dominant social norms, and language barriers. It is the intent of the Tafesilafa'i conversation to make a critical contribution towards reversing these trends, offering a Samoan-specific alternative. Tafesilafa'i proposes to do this by re-weaving the fabric of relationships in

⁹ Ibid. 6-8.

communities, having each member of the community model what it's like to maintain the *va* through the act of *fa'aaloalo* or respect. Building strong relationships allows families and individuals the social capital necessary to reverse social isolation and replace it with communities that have the relationships, capacities, and power to resolve fundamental social challenges facing families today. When the *va* is distinguished between persons, care is taken that it not lead to separation, enmity, or death, but through the process of harmonization and integration the *va* is properly maintained for the common good.

Cultural and Social Learning: One of the basic ideas that has risen from this project is that the products of the mind are related to the functions of the social communities of which people are a part. Any construct that purports to put forward an epistemological framework has to make an effort to recognize human nature and the different ways this nature shows up in the world. In our project, Tafesilafa'i integrates cross-cultural research with psychology, anthropology, and other social sciences. This construct takes what we know about human nature and integrates it with patterns of the social worlds in which we live. Tafesilafa'i also has a faith component which introduces the realm of the spiritual. The incorporation of all these disciplines will become even more important with the globalization of our planet, and with the increasing intensity of interaction by people from different cultural backgrounds and contexts. Diversity is critical as we think about human nature and examine the different ways of living and interacting. Our departure point is the recognition of humans as a social process within a social context.

Social learning theory posits that “people learn from observing other people. By definition, such observations take place in a social setting.”¹⁰ It was the behaviorist psychologists who looked at how people learn through observations. Later researchers, like Albert Bandura, focused on interaction and cognitive processes, allowing people to see the consequences of other’s behavior. Life would be unbearable if people were to rely solely on their own experience to inform them of what to do. “Fortunately, most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action.”¹¹ In the Samoan community, where attention is focused on relationships between beings and the importance of social constructs in nurturing communal connection, there is little else going on for learning, outside the confines of the social. In addition, what gets retained and reproduced in the Samoan community are rituals, proverbs, and rhetoric in the Samoan language that motivates a learner to do something. When we ask the question: what is unique about the Samoan culture in diaspora? The answer is: it’s the rituals (*ava* ceremony, *ifoga*, *asiga*, *malaga*, *talimalo*, *tapuaiga*), proverbs and language (the rhetoric defines a people). These elements distinguish for the learner that which is presentationally immediate about Samoan culture. As the learner moves towards the center, the learner will find these elements existing authentically in the social realm, in contemplation of the *va* and in engagement of the divine in some form of worship or reverence.

¹⁰ Sharon B. Merriam and Rosemary S. Caffarella, Learning in Adulthood. A Comprehensive Guide, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), 134.

¹¹ Albert Bandura, *Social Learning Theory* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1977), 22.

The key aspects of observational learning are attention, retention, and reproduction. In the Samoan community, the symbols retained from the life cycle events act as templates with which one's future actions are compared. The constant rehearsal of these modeling opportunities in different situations, and the insertion of different diasporic realities, allows persons to compare their actions to the modeling experiences, thus sustaining the learning process. A simple example is the *sua* presentation, which is the highest display of *fa'aaloalo* or respect in the Samoan culture. It is reserved for those in positions of authority and power, including fiduciaries. Although each component of the *sua* has been contextualized and adapted in accordance with the milieu of the presentation.¹² The various components together still communicate *fa'aaloalo* or respect.

Another model for social learning is that suggested by Lave and Wenger. Instead of looking to learning as the acquisition of certain forms of knowledge, they have tried to place it in social relationships - situations of co-participation. "Rather than asking what kind of cognitive processes and conceptual structures are involved, they ask what kinds of social engagements provide the proper context for learning to take place."¹³ In this model, the learner not only acquires structures or models for understanding the world, but also participates in these frameworks. Tafesilafa'i, in this sense, takes the Samoan social structures and invites the community to participate in co-creating socially empowering frameworks in the diaspora. Initially, people join communities and learn at the periphery. As persons become more competent, they move into the center of the community. This

¹² Traditional *fa'a-Samoa* would have a person climb a coconut tree to get a coconut that is husked in preparation for the *sua* presentation; another would go to the garden to get a *sei* or a flower to decorate the coconut. This represents the *vailolo* component of the *sua*. In the diaspora, a can of soda pop is used and instead of a flower, a dollar bill is used.

¹³ Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 14.

way of learning involves social participation and collaboration in a *nu'u* or community of practice. Ostensibly, this social process subsumes the learning of knowledgeable skills.¹⁴ A specific example is the Second Samoan community in downtown Long Beach, where members practice love, extravagant welcome, solidarity, harmony, peaceful coexistence, and commitment.¹⁵ Reflecting on the practice of this theory in the Samoan community, it perhaps has other observation selection criteria that is not as obvious; in reality, moving to the center from the periphery, at least in the Samoan community, requires an entire lifetime and sometimes several generations before you can arrive at the center.¹⁶ This theory, however, does provide a way to speak about the relations between newcomers and old-timers, something that the Samoan community has not had to seriously address until the diaspora.

In situated learning, there is a concern with identity, because identity is what makes a distinct community, and identity gives the community energy. Moreover, and in contrast with learning as internalization, this is learning as “increasing participation in communities of practice (which) concerns the whole person acting in the world.”¹⁷ The focus seems to be on ways in which learning is “an evolving, continuously renewed set of relations.”¹⁸ This theory sits well with the nature of the *fa'a-Samoa*, as it is a relational

¹⁴ Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning*, 29.

¹⁵ Misipouena Tagaloa, “Education with a Heart in Samoan Diasporic Communities.” A qualifying exam question. Claremont School of Theology 2006.

¹⁶ Center in this context is a spiritual space where the divine occupies. It is an ideal that cannot be attainable. It is the mystery that gifts people with hope, what'snextness and possibility. It is Samoa in the literal sense – it is a holy center.

¹⁷ Ibid., 49.

¹⁸ Ibid., 50.

view of the person, learning, and community, constantly in flux. One is cautioned that these relations tend to evolve very slowly over a much longer period of time than most would anticipate. This orientation certainly draws attention to the need to understand knowledge and learning in context. But it also raises the following issues in the Samoan community of practice: What about knowledge that is decontextualized, abstract, or general? How about new knowledge from outside the community of practice, how is it appropriated? In the Samoan community, the unique language of discourse acts as an initial filter, blocking access to the community of practice. For the Samoan community in the diaspora, decontextualized knowledge, coming from the dominant culture, is used mostly when the community of practice is weak, or is absent; then outside knowledge is appropriated for problem solving.

In situated learning, learning occurs in relationships with people. This is what *Tafesilafa'i* proposes for the Samoan community. It proposes to bring people together and organize around a common point of contact, their culture, which then allows for specific particular pieces of information to take on relevance; without the system of relevancies, without the common points of contact, there is little learning and memory. Learning not only belongs to the individual persons, but to the conversation of which they are a part. As such, the role of the educator is to encourage people to become participants in the community of practice. Formal educators need to connect with informal educators in the community and invite them to participate in the *Tafesilafa'i* conversation. The educator needs to be an active listener, exploring with people in the communities how they may participate fully in the life of the community. This exploration comes in the form of an invitation and a granting of responsibility for

furthering the conversation. The educator has to connect knowledge with activity and be able to distinguish between activities that build community and those that do not. Educators have to be in community as well, so they know when community is not being built up.

Other researchers have looked to explore the extent to which learning or intelligence lies in the resources to which people have access. This obviously includes such resources as libraries and high speed internet, but it may also include such basic tools as backpacks, pens, and pencils. As Gardner puts it, “intelligence is better thought of as ‘distributed’ in the world rather than ‘in the head’”¹⁹ While the individual is significant, epistemological analysis should focus on the joint, socially mediated activity in the cultural context as well.

Finally, there have been a number of books written about education, which clearly define a trajectory in learning that tilts towards the direction in which Tafesilafa’i is heading. In *Short Route to Chaos*, Stephen Arons, a legal scholar who studied the political and constitutional battles over schooling, demonstrates that political control of curriculum and teaching inevitably leads to social conflict, the erosion of diversity and community, and the destruction of the individual rights of consciousness. Arons observes that American society contains a wide diversity of cultural heritages, worldviews, religious, and ethnic identities, and other communities of belief. This is a strength and not a weakness. To maintain a democratic society, the freedom of conscience – the

¹⁹ Howard Gardner, The Disciplined Mind: Beyond Facts and Standardized Tests: The K-12 Education That Every Child Deserves (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999), 24.

individuals' and families' right to associate in communities of meaning of their choice – must be preserved.²⁰

Sonia Nieto's Affirming Diversity is an approach from a multicultural paradigm, in which she suggests that multiculturalism should be considered a basic skill for living in a world of diversity. Nieto argues that social and political realities, school curricula and practices and multiculturalism of students and their communities “must be understood in tandem.” And a democratic education is one that “takes students seriously, uses their experiences as a basis for furthering learning, and helps them develop into critical and empowered citizens.”²¹

Nel Noddings, in writing about caring in schools, ultimately challenges our competitive and economic view of education with a different set of priorities. In a humane sense, she asks: “How can we value academic rigor over inner peace, sensitive and caring relationships, a nonviolent community and a culture that exists in harmony with Earth?”²² In relating to this idea of caring in schools, Lynn Stoddard suggests that “it is impossible to reform education within the prevailing frame of reference, which is characterized by a mental fixation on curriculum development instead of human development.”²³ Stoddard came to believe that the mission of education is to nurture the three dimensions of human greatness – personal identity (individual character and talent,

²⁰ Stephen Arons, Short Route to Chaos: Conscience, Community, and the Re-Constitution of American Schooling (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997).

²¹ Sonia Nieto, Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education, (New York: Longman, 1992), 222.

²² Nel Noddings, The Challenge to Care in Schools: An Alternative Approach to Education (New York: Teacher College Press, 1992)

²³ Lynn Stoddard, Redesigning Education: A Guide for Developing Human Greatness (Tucson, AZ: Zephyr Press, 1992)

sense of self-worth), interaction (compassion, empathy, respect), and inquiry (passion for learning and understanding problem-solving skills). According to Stoddard, education for greatness is in harmony with human nature; people want to grow. With this view, teaching is not an act of aggressive indoctrination, but a warm mentoring relationship of trust and caring.

In Freedom's Plow, the collection of writings on societies with increasing cultural diversity suggests that if there is to be democracy in the 21st century, it must be a multiracial/multicultural democracy. Unless democracy is conceptualized to include all groups, democracy will lose its meaning. It is clear from the editors and the contributors to Freedom's Plow that multicultural education must be the heart of a democratic education and not just a peripheral addition to the standard curriculum, because it has been shown that the dominant culture teacher's own cultural expectations are usually unresponsive to the needs of the students from diverse backgrounds. The editors call upon all educators to become critically introspective in order to realize the role culture plays in forming our own identities, ideas and ways of teaching.²⁴

Finally in Multicultural Models for Religious Education, the editor gathers various insights from contributors of diverse and often multiple ethnicities, to define a culture that is uniquely Southern California. It describes the borderland as places where there are interconnections and collusions between people of different races, ethnicities and classes. The work underscores the fact that the dualistic modes of thinking and

²⁴ Theresa Perry and James W. Fraser, Freedom's Plow: Teaching in the Multicultural Classroom. (New York: Routledge, 1993).

understanding of opposing ideas and knowledge is no longer a viable mode of teaching in the borderland.²⁵

Economic Implications

The Archduke Otto von Habsburg once asked Zhou En-Lai: “What do you think of the French Revolution?” Zhou En-Lai, at the time was battling Mao Zedong for control of China, took quite a long time to respond. When he finally did, he answered with conviction: “It’s too soon to tell.” If it is too soon to tell about the French Revolution, which occurred between 1789 and 1799, after its hundred and fiftieth anniversary, it is much too soon to tell about the economic implications of the scaffolding that we are building in the diasporic Samoan community. My desire is that the Tafesilafa’i conversation be more than an academically fashionable prognostication. Already people genuinely seem to feel themselves in between a curtain-change in their consciousness. The uncertainty seems to be whether we are witnessing the end of something old or a part of the beginning of something radically new. The conviction is widespread and growing that we are no longer in Tutuila, and though our bodies are already moving in some emerging new multiracial, multicultural, and postmodern world, our hearts may still be left behind, stuck in the deracinated and disconnected forms of classical theism and its passing epoch introduced by the missionaries.

The church is slowly warming up to the idea that it has a huge responsibility for bringing about social and economic justice in more innovative and less coercive ways during these times of radical changes in the world; the Samoan diasporic church is coming to know that the God of the missionaries is also concerned about social and

²⁵ Elizabeth Conde-Frazier ed., Multicultural Models for Religious Education (Atlanta: SCP Third World Literature Publishing House, 2001), 1.

economic justice issues in the world. Tafesilafa'i stands in this prophetic tradition of the church that seeks to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God.²⁶

However, church is still mostly pre-occupied with the small change issues of religion and as John Cobb jokingly points out, yet seriously based upon Whiteheads comment about rugby, if your theology cannot explain such a common event as Samoans playing football, then we need to get another theology.²⁷

TAFESILAFI CURRICULUM

Having had the opportunity to pay close attention to the diasporic Samoan community over the last twenty years as a participant and for the last twelve, as a researcher, I propose the following curriculum as a tentative application of the insights gleaned from this work in order to begin the process of re-weaving relationships and equipping members of the community with tools for education and transformation. After participating in a transformational process, one may be naturally empowered to engage others with the purpose of transforming community, such that the quality of life improves for all. The following prescription was honed from a particular context and its major goal is to raise consciousness of the *va* between all beings.

FIRST SITTING

I. Tafesilafa'i 101 – Orientation and Overview

²⁶ Micah 6:8

²⁷ John Cobb was the resident theologian for Tafesilafa'i 2005. In his remarks at the Leaders gathering on the unbiblical nature of the doctrine of omnipotence, he suggested that perhaps our theology should be revisited, should it not explain rugby and football in the Samoan community.

Participants are given an overview, a history – a sense of what they might expect, as well as descriptions of how others have received the most value from Tafesilafa'i in the past. The lay of the land is reviewed, the history of Tafesilafa'i is shared, and there is always an opportunity to ask questions and to dialogue with the leader. As the number of participants increases, there becomes less generative interaction with the leader and thus smaller groups are better. The setting can initially be a meeting of youth leaders who have decided to participate in the Tafesilafa'i Festival or it can easily be a youth gathering where information about Tafesilafa'i is disseminated and presented. Because Tafesilafa'i is a communal conversation, participants bring with them their own expectations to the conversation. Each expectation can be objected to, but all are respected and distinguished, either individually or communally, and acknowledged to be a fair expectation; this can be contributory to the conversation that is Tafesilafa'i, which aspires to constitute the totality of the Samoan experience in diaspora.

One of the clarifications needed involves voluntary participation. Prior participating in Tafesilafa'i, there ought to be no pressure or any insurmountable objections -- disruptive, contentious, and taking up non-productive energy. In essence, because this conversation is about our Samoan community and communal knowing, participation has to be constructed to foster community and solidarity, and this is negotiated up front and center. Each person's individuality is respected, and no resources are spared to create an atmosphere of acceptance, well being and catharsis. If there are any individual's sentiments that are stronger than the desire to be in community, the conversation cannot begin and that person's participation is discouraged. There are no

presentational immediate incentives for participating, and no certificates at the end of the conversation.

The Tafesilafa'i conversation began as an attempt to have the Samoan culture in dialogue with theology. It was initially an attempt to get a people to think theologically about their culture and how their ideas of God impact their lives directly. Targeting the youth seemed wise and so the conversation naturally looked for conversation partners from youth groups in the churches. It was intended to be a safe space where the community can examine their culture closely and have it dialogue with theology. Tafesilafa'i, in essence, is culture informed by theology. Since then, the conversation has been appropriated by the Samoan community in diaspora, and a cottage industry and infrastructure has grown up to support the vision of a conversation about the Samoan culture informed by theology.

After this initial orientation and overview, the stage is set for people to engage Tafesilafa'i with intentionality, expectation and heightened awareness. Each youth leader is invited to choose participation in the conversation and to glean from the participants that which makes life worth living.

II. *Lau Aganu'u* - Existing Cultural Constructs

We acknowledge that all enter the conversation with certain existing cultural constructs and knowledge. While the goal for education and transformation is to be open-minded and objective, reality insists that our approach to ourselves, our circumstances, to life and to others is often informed by pre-existing notions and ideas. Through stories about our youth, our upbringing, our values, what happened to us and our past experiences, we see

our presuppositions, assumptions, and ideas percolate to the top and are examined communally. Our heightened awareness of these filters and recognition of the limits they impose on our lives, distinguishes them for us, such that a *va* is discerned that gives us a renewed freedom, knowing that everyone else carries the same presuppositions and assumptions, though some are doing so unknowingly.

My son, when he was ten, accidentally pushed forward a child half his size and both were sent to the principal's office where my son was made to "look the principal straight in the eye." When I explained that Samoan children, when disciplined, are cautioned not to look directly at the authority figure and that direct eye contact with authority is a sign of defiance, the principal was much more accepting, calm, and peaceful. This example underscores how most schools provide little opportunities for the give-and-take of dialogue, and interchanges tend to be unilateral and highly restrictive as they are teacher-initiated and dominated.²⁸ In this real life incident, I invited the principal to examine how she came to know "lack of eye contact" as a sign of defiance and lack of attention, for in this she will have made the connection between the symbols system she is an agent of and the concrete actions, referents, and experiences that the symbols stem from.²⁹ When this story was told at one of our Tafesilafa'i gatherings, a lot of freedom opened up for other adults, and many were personally empowered by the knowledge of

²⁸ Belenky, et. al. Women's Ways of Knowing, 34. See also Kenneth A. Sirotnik, "What you see is what you get: Consistency, Persistency and Mediocrity in Classrooms." Harvard Education Review, 53 (1983): 19-38.

²⁹ See also Patricia M. Greenfield, "Oral or written language: The Consequences for Cognitive Development in Africa, USA and England." Language and Speech, 15 (1972): 169-78; Patricia M. Greenfield and Jean Lave, "Cognitive Aspects of Informal Education," in Cultural Perspectives on Child Development, eds. D. Wagner and H. Stevenson (San Francisco: Freeman & Co., 1982), 181-270; Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole, "The Cognitive Consequences of Formal and Informal Education." Science, 182 (1973): 553-59; Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole, The Psychology of Literacy. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).

what may have happened similarly to their children in the past, but also what is possible for their grandchildren in the future. For the first time Tafesilafa'i participants were able to locate a natural context and place where some of their treatment of authority figure comes from.

Life cycle events, or *faalavelave*, are also discussed especially as to how these events, often seen as challenges and processes which impoverish the community, can be opportunities in education, re-educating, and building life in the community. In the continuum suggested by Conde-Frazier on experiential learning, existing perceptions of the community about life cycle events are brought to the table and are placed in dialogue with each other, in some cases leading to discomfort and dissonance. These experiences are then reflected upon and these reflections serve as building blocks for new experiences leading to new patterns of thought and meaningful actions and habits.³⁰ When we examine our biases, a lot of room opens up for the next step along the journey towards Christ-like-consciousness.

III. *Mamanu le Vaaia* – Hidden Context

Because most of the work that Tafesilafa'i does is toward context, at this portion of the conversation, we suggest a perspective that exists in all human endeavors: Context is most important. *Mamanu* means scaffolding. Scaffolding is to a construction project, what context is to transformation. Context is the water that we swim in; it is what makes rock hard and water wet. Context is the container which gives frozen water its form. It is the driving force of all that occurs in our lives. Context is what gives our lives form,

³⁰ Conde-Frazier, Kang and Parrett, Many Colored Kingdom, 198-99. See also David Kolb, Experiential Learning (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1984).

meaning, and purpose. It is our conditioning. It is the air that we breathe, and it is mostly hidden; we do not think much about context. That is why it often determines what we see and what we don't see; what we consider and what we fail to notice; what we are able to do and what seems beyond our reach.³¹ All behaviors – all ways of being and acting – are correlated to the context from which we live our lives, and in some cases are unaware of.

An example of this invisible context is whenever a *palagi* or a Caucasian, attends our church service, my father feels obligated to preach in English to this one person who does not speak Samoan, and invariably he does it expending great effort. What is the hidden context that so compels a preacher to do this? Why does it not happen in European churches with English speaking pastors, when a lone Samoan walks into the church? Why doesn't the preacher expend great effort using her broken Samoan, to reach out to this lone soul? Examining this and other hidden contexts closely, will distinguish for all of us additional relationships and opportunities in education and transformation.

When these contexts become apparent, identified, and known, each story then begins to point to an unwitting process by which they were pulled together, and the degree to which they govern our everyday lives. When this process of how discerning hidden context is clearly distinguished, we are left, possibly for the first time, with a choice about who we are and who we have come to be, or who we can be, separate from these once hidden contexts. There is a freedom from whatever restricted us and an ability to take action that was unavailable before – even familiar actions produce a whole new level of effectiveness. bell hooks talks about not being able to speak about black people

³¹ Palmer, 33-46

and love without addressing the hidden context of self-esteem and self-hatred.³² And while bell hooks suggests self-love as a revolutionary intervention that undermines practices of domination, Tafesilafa'i would advocate being present to the hidden contexts without loss. There is a sot in our indigenous past of a young hero who was running from an *aitu* or ghost; reflecting upon his dilemma, he decided to confront his pursuer. When he stopped to confront the beast, he discovered that it was his own flesh and blood. The hero's ability to be present with the beast, and finding kin with the object of his fear, led to many more discoveries. Once these "*mamamu le va'ia*" are named, they begin to lose their hold on us and many relationships and opportunities for reverence open up for new knowledge, experiences and possibilities. Samoans in diaspora are kept from participating actively in the pursuits of the new world because of their inability to be with hidden contexts in the diaspora. Who Samoans are as a community, how Samoans relate to newer paradigms in the new world, and how they know that hidden contexts are keeping them from a reality that is ultimately God's, would be the goal at this particular juncture of the conversation.

The awareness of the hidden contexts in our lives comes to one in the process of staying in relationship with those wise persons who have identified these *mamamu* for themselves. It is an emerging moment in the life of a person that stays in community. In the *fa'a-Samoa*, it is a gift from God that may be accessed in solitary, but is honed, perpetuated and can be utilized only for the community.

IV. *Tosi Nini'i* - Collapsing: Hermeneutics for Empowerment

³² bell hooks, *Salvation: Black People and Love* (New York: Perennial, 2001), 55-70

We suggest that it is a human tendency to make meaning for all that occurs in life. Just as a person learns much from causal efficacy, and receives readily from symbolic reference, unconsciously skipping over presentational immediacy in coming to know we distinguish for the participants the two modes of perception: that which is present and immediate versus that which is past, forward and efficacious. Using stories, we suggest that a learner often collapses, or considers one and the same, the story of what one *thinks* happened with what actually happened, and that what actually gets communicated is often a prescription instead of a description of what happened. In distinguishing the difference we discover that we often fail to differentiate between what actually happened and the meaning of what happened. It is the uncoupling of the two in which we are most interested in at this point. Collapsing again in this context means that the distinction between what happened and the story or meaning of what happened has not yet been distinguished. The *va* has not been properly established or respected. For example, it is such a part of our nature to pass directly from “a colored object” to the enjoyment of the “chair” that it is only through rigorous training that we give up the “chair” so we can enjoy the “colored object.” Almost immediately, and certainly over time, the story we tell ourselves becomes the way it is – the reality we know. It limits what is possible in our lives, robbing us of much of our joy and effectiveness. In the diaspora, collapsing continues; there are more choices for collapsing and many more iterations for possibilities of being.

One of the participants in the research became pregnant outside of marriage when she was just a teenager. This was such a cause of shame for the family that she was sent to the States to live with her aunt, sparing the extended family the disgrace. This was

twenty five years ago. During a conversation session, she distinguished for herself that the act of sending her to the States meant that her mother did not love her. The same act to another would have meant an opportunity to explore new venues and possibilities. However, she took the act of being pregnant, which led her to be sent to the States, to mean that she was less than an ideal child. The same act to another would have meant God had blessed her. She made it mean that everything she touches turns to a mess. She had this interpretation, which she has not talked about until recently, but it is obvious that she projected this interpretation of an act that happened in the past onto her life, and this has created a reality for her and those she lives. She ended up marrying a person who had the same disregard for her, she dropped out of college when her mother asked her how she intended to pay for college with her salary, and her next child was never seen as a gift but as a burden and an obligation to be put up with.³³ When she distinguished that this “collapsing” of what happened and what she thought happened was running her life, she became a different person, more conscious and more transformed.

Even more poignant examples of this tendency to collapse multiple distinctions are found in the proverbs of the Samoan culture. Proverbs tend to truncate and reduce the multitude of experiences into neat packages. This is an example both of how collapsing occurs and how the process of distinguishing or reconstruction can be illuminating and life giving. When one is able to separate what happened from the story or interpretation of what happened, we discover that much of what we considered already determined, given and fixed, may in fact not be so. Situations that may have been challenging or

³³ This story is a specific incidence that came out of a conversation in 2005 during the death of a local member of a participant’s family. Through the process of self reflection participants were made aware of how contexts influence their lives unconsciously.

difficult suddenly become fluid and open to change, and we find ourselves no longer limited by a finite set of options but are able to achieve infinitely that which seemed impossible with new ease, dexterity, and fulfillment.

The setting is usually at gatherings of local youth groups or several youth groups yoked together in an association which provides a safe environment where truth telling and wisdom seeking can be done in a nurturing context. The stories that participants bring in would be their own personal life stories and personal experiences; the role of the instructor is to engage their story telling and meaning making mechanisms so that they are able to discern if they have been collapsing. Charles Melchert outlines a similar approach, as he points out that Jesus never used bible stories to get a point across but real life experiences tempered with compassion.³⁴ In this context, education is often times humorous and playful, and students find the subject matter more engaging and “real.” As they delve deeper into the stories the students discover that much of whom they have become, they have invented themselves or had agency in their self-construction. Answers to questions such as “who am I” begin to shift from names to roles to characteristics to proclamations to finally nothing -- and yet, everything. When they get to this point and are able to remain there, then it is time to move on to the next section as they have now been given many more options to reexamine and understand their lives. With this new insight they can re-interpret the stories in new light to discern wisdom and possibility.³⁵

³⁴ Melchert, Charles, Wise Teachings: Biblical Wisdom and Educational Ministry (Harrisburg PA: Trinity Press 1998) Chapter 6, “Why didn’t Jesus tell Bible Stories?”

³⁵ Wisdom moments occur naturally in community and within the interstices of the *fa’a-Samoa*. These moments are plentiful and lose their potency when captured on paper. Intervention, identification, facilitation and human effort have little impact on the frequency of these gifts from God, to participants at

V. *Fa'asea* – Complaints.

Throughout the years we have heard from members a variety of complaints of how their lives are not working. Though most are valid and legitimate, nonetheless, they are still complaints, nudgings of hopelessness. Here we distinguish complaints as an unproductive way of being or acting. Often, we don't notice that while our complaints may seem justified and even legitimate, there is a certain payoff. There is some advantage or benefit we are receiving that reinforces this cycle of behavior. Having distinguished collapsing and the difference between what happened and one's interpretation of what happened, complaints are distinguished further into payoffs and costs. The complaining and the bickering mask some reward that we are receiving, whether emotional or otherwise, for keeping the complaints in the conversation. At the same time, this way of being has a tremendous cost, whether in our relationships, vitality, affinity, self-expression, or sense of fulfillment.

The story of the invalid waiting thirty-eight years at the pool of Bethesda for the great healing is an excellent illustration that we have often used and analyzed.³⁶ The complaints that families bring with them for why their lives are not working are also analyzed, and the joy and the cost of their complaints are weighed and considered. By

Tafesilafa'i. We can safely assume that these "glimpses of glory" surround those who are engaged in *va* building activities.

³⁶ John 5: Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews. Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. Here a great number of disabled people used to lie – the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?" "Sir" the invalid replied. "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me." Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." At once the man was cured: he picked up his mat and walked."

recognizing this pattern of hopelessness, its cost, and how we have been instrumental in keeping these patterns in place, we acquire the ability to interrupt the cycle and discover new ways of interactions that lead to new levels of happiness, satisfaction, and fulfillment. It is learning to complain smart that is the goal of this session and it includes finding empowerment in ordinary activities. It is realizing that we have agency and the complaints are only benchmarks on the road of life that can lead us down the road to empowerment.³⁷ Much of the biblical narrative is an account of how complaints were distinguished in community and how God, through the prophets and apostles often reframed these complaints to bring forth hope and empowerment. Knowing this will lead us naturally to spiritual practices that move us from hospitality to shalom.³⁸

SECOND SITTING

I. *Se'i Sau Malama* – The Illusion of “Someday.”

If someone were to say to us, “x is possible” we would normally understand them to mean that x does not now exist, and that its existence, even someday, is not certain. This is the ordinary use of the term possibility; however, when we use the term *malama*, we are not speaking about something remote or an event that may happen out in the future. We are speaking about an immediate and powerful impact to our lives in the now, the present and at close range. Till next light, or *se'i sau malama*, can occur at a blink of an

³⁷ *Fa'asea* or complaint signifies hopelessness. In addressing these flashes of hopelessness, Tafesilafa'i proposes to empower the community to find ways of looking at these breakdowns as opportunities for healing. The cause of many of the *fa'asea* is because of the ill maintaining or usurping of the *va*. After identifying the entities involved in the complaint, the next step is to identify the benefits and the cost of sustaining the *fa'asea*. Once the cost is prohibitive in relations to the benefit of the complaint, the *fa'asea* will cease to exist and empowerment is left behind.

³⁸ Conde-Frazier, Kang and Parrett, Many Colored Kingdom, 168-69.

eye. It does not have to be tomorrow or the next day or someday, it can be the next time I blink my eye. Again using the continuum suggested by Conde-Frazier, the students are invited into self-examination, identification or clarification of an issue.³⁹ The participants are invited to a deeper encounter with the issue at hand and as the scales fall from their eyes, a new vision or reality emerges. The idea of time as something that we do not have control over is distinguished and changed to include the idea that eternity touches the now, and the infinite brushes up against the finite.

Our work in the community invariably brings up the question of “How long have you been here?” One of the insights into the Samoan diasporic communities that keeps them from participating fully in life in the States, is that they are always “waiting to go home,” someday, with home meaning somewhere other than here.⁴⁰ When asked why they have not purchased a home yet, or registered to vote yet, the answer is some variation of “waiting to go home,” someday. Thirty years later, they are still renting an apartment, “waiting to go home,” someday. While this makes a powerful eschatological position, “waiting” someday, does not lend itself well to social and economic justice conversations. In this section, we distinguished for the students that “*se 'i sau malamalama*” can be thirty five years, or it can also mean instantaneous.

The illusion of someday gives way to a new view of possibility which has an immediate and powerful impact on who we are, how we live our lives, and how we see things – now, in the present. The *va* between eternity and now is created and respected.

³⁹ Ibid., p.199-200.

⁴⁰ Participatory Action Research done with twelve Samoan families in the Long Beach, South Bay area in 2002-2003 revealed that most of the adults have this notion that their time in the US is only temporary and that they will someday go back to Samoa either to retire or to live permanently.

With this new possibility, we have the power to move, touch, and inspire others and ourselves, to shape our actions; and to shift the way we are being right now. Letting go of the “waiting to go home,” someday, each is offered another way of looking at the world that may be equally valid as the one they have now. It is similar to constructed knowledge where the different messages and voices are integrated into the totality of a knower: “all knowledge is constructed and the knower is an intimate part of the known.”⁴¹

II. *Fatumanava*: Discerning the possibilities of alternatives.

In this part of the conversation, we explore the nature of what we think of as reality, which includes an objective world that exists independent of us; a reality where cause and effect are key operative factors; where I, as an identity, am a collection of characteristics, attributes, culture, and experiences from the past. In exploring the nature of reality and taking apart these myths, other possibilities arise. There are Tafesilafa'i participants who are uncomfortable in their own skin. For reasons unbeknownst even to themselves, they are nervous about who they are. Who knows why we are like that? Some participants come to these encounters fidgety. They often are not aware of their own involvement in their own construction and as such they are cause in the matter; as they continue, they come to realize that they have the power to deconstruct and reconstitute their identities to be generative, life giving, and expressive. The entire Tafesilafa'i conversation was an invented possibility and a reconstituted reality for Samoans in the diaspora. The fact that Tafesilafa'i is still going on makes this invention and re-constitution a reality. The idea

⁴¹ Belenky, et al., Women's Ways of Knowing, 137.

of gathering the Samoan community in Southern California by itself was a fantasy, meaning that it was a remote possibility, similar to the idea of ending poverty in the world. However, when distinguished and placed in dialogue with the possibility of not ending poverty in the world, then the possibility exists and can become a reality. There is already a reality called poverty, then there is an attempt to end poverty; and to properly distinguish this possibility, it has to be differentiated from the possibility that poverty cannot be eliminated.

During this portion of the conversation, we do not so much observe the particularities of the realities we construct, but we note that it is human to construct and re-constitute. Part of the *fatumanava* or godly attribute that distinguishes the Samoan psyche is the ability to promulgate, to create and to invent. We have total agency and we are constantly constructing and reconstituting our realities in relation to others. As humans we sometimes forget that we are architects of our own reality. And when we forget our connectedness and relatedness to our realities, we fail to distinguish the *va* between reality, which can ground us, and fantasy, which can push us into despair. In education, when we divorce the knower from the known, we collapse community and accountability and this can be dangerous.⁴² When we realize this, we will see that we no longer need to be confined to living within the limitation afforded by our creations of the past.

III. *Iloilo & Saili*: Distinguishing New Worlds

⁴² Palmer, To Know As We Are Known, 26.

To distinguish or discern something means to take it from an undifferentiated background and bring it to the foreground. Just as learning a new language builds a bridge to a new culture, drawing distinctions gives us facility to navigate in areas that were previously inaccessible.

We have discovered that the general level of how individuals identify themselves as Samoans in the States is very low when compared to Samoan peers in the Islands.⁴³ Among traditional Samoans, efforts to acknowledge and maintain strong personal relationships between individuals, families, and the Creator are the common threads between language, culture and the human response. How one is in relation to others is called the *va*, and it is more deep than just a set of rules and protocols to follow; it is the entire worldview that revolves around the idea of respecting others in a basic and fundamental way. The maintenance of the *va* is good among Samoans in the islands, but due to fewer forums for practice, fewer life cycle events to attend, and fewer venues for being Samoan, the *va* is weak in the diasporic environment. As such, contributions to the well being of the greater community are thus diminished.

Distinctions give power and breadth to the ability to live creatively and successfully. During this portion of the conversation, the students, by engaging personal testimonies from others, are invited to keep distinguishing new worlds and new possibilities in their lives in the past and moving forward in the future, sharing them with others so they too are contributed to. The participant develops creative ways to deliver the message of kingdom reality which often includes socio-cultural narratives and

⁴³ Tafesilafa'i conducted a survey in 2001 where 1,400 participants were surveyed and one of the findings was: Samoans in are presented less opportunities to define themselves as Samoans in diaspora compared to Samoa.

personal testimonies.⁴⁴ With this new ability to distinguish, differentiate, and set apart, we are left with new worlds, new insights, and new opportunities for new actions.

IV. *Aua ete Fefe*: Fear Not

Consider that one of the primary obstacles to effectiveness is fear. No matter how accomplished, successful, or courageous we are, fear and anxiety seem to play a role at some point in our lives. In immigrant communities, fear is most prominent as immigrants try to negotiate the cultural differences in addition to all else. Often we allow our fears and anxieties to stop us, to determine how much we'll risk, and to limit the range in which we live, by assigning them unwarranted power and magnitude in our lives.⁴⁵ In the diasporic Samoan context, origins of these fears range from learning a new language, to remembering the directions to places, to confronting otherness and to walking on economic water. Fear induces anxiety when one is too slow or fails to learn fast enough. But there are still other ways to communicate and this portion of the conversation reminds immigrants of other possibilities. In the diasporic Samoan communities, the biblical narrative serves the purpose of reminding us of possibilities other than what is so and the Judeo-Christian tradition plays an important role in the empowerment of the Samoan community.

The biblical tradition, through stories of conquests and mighty acts of God in the world, gives people hope, strength, and encouragement. This tradition also gives them

⁴⁴ Conde-Frazier, Kang and Parrett, Many Colored Kingdom, 162. The teacher becomes the innovator in this part of the curriculum.

⁴⁵ Matthew 14:22-33 is a story of how anxiety and fear determines the amount of risk we are willing to take and it also underscores the fact that much of these fears and anxiety are unwarranted.

permission to confront their fears and not doubt that they can overcome obstacles of whatever sort. The story of Caleb and Joshua as well as the entire Exodus narrative in the Hebrew scripture stands in this tradition.⁴⁶ Other stories such as the prophecies of Jeremiah find fitting applications to Samoans in diaspora and energize the search for wholeness and fulfillment in a foreign land.⁴⁷ Fernando Segovia draws similar parallels between the First Testament narrative and Latinos in diaspora, characterizing the United State as the “promised land” and Hispanic Americans as charge with the duty of spreading the good news of the “kingdom of God” to all of creation.⁴⁸ When we see that our relationship to our anxieties and fears inadvertently gives these fears a life of their own, something else becomes possible. When we see that we have agency in what scares us, possibility occurs. We find ourselves being powerful in the face of what has stopped us before, and are at liberty to rediscover and pursue our passions in life.

V. Se Tama Oe a Ai? Who am I: Constructing Our Identities

In this part of the conversation, we inquire into how our identities – who we consider ourselves to be – were created. Here is a theory: the process of identity forming began in childhood, as we gradually adopted ways of being and acting to deal successfully with things that didn’t quite go the way we thought they ought to. By the time we reach

⁴⁶ Numbers 13:27-30 Twelve were sent to inspect the promised land, they all came back with the same report, but ten were disheartening and only Caleb and Joshua were encouraged by it.

⁴⁷ Jeremiah 29:5-7 “Build ye houses, and dwell in them and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them. Take ye wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; that ye may be increase there and not diminished. And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.” (KJV)

⁴⁸ Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz and Fernando F. Segovia. “Introduction: Aliens in the Promised Land: The Manifest Destiny of US Hispanic American Theology” in Hispanic/Latino Theology: Challenge and Promise (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 15-42.

adulthood, we have assembled a set of practices and approaches, attributes and characteristics, which seem to give us a certain measure of success or wholeness – these make up our personality, our style, who we consider ourselves to be. During these sessions, the question “Who am I?” is raised and a review of the answers will reveal that much of what we have come to know as our identity, we have invented. When all possibilities for identities are exhausted we finally come to the realization that we can be something else. One participant who has gone through this exercise comments:

“Now, whenever I go to seminars where you pre-register and they have a name tag waiting at the door, I am tempted to pick up a name tag other than my own and see what it is like to be an identity other than what I have created.”⁴⁹

When we begin to see that our identity was put together arbitrarily and in most cases, in response to something “negative” that we had determined shouldn’t be,⁵⁰ the result is a new freedom in selecting who we are – a fundamental shift in how we see and know as possible. It is at this juncture that we juxtapose our response to our culture as something we choose to do, and to do with both our eyes open.

THIRD SITTING

I. *O le Tuana’i*: The Pervasive Influence of the Past

It seems that much of what makes up today, and even tomorrow, is an extension or variation of what has gone on before. What we see as possible – what we are working towards – when it is not energized or interrupted, is essentially a better, or at least a

⁴⁹ Quote from a participant during story telling and fact finding sessions.

⁵⁰ Belenky, et al., Women’s Ways of Knowing, 78. See also Erik Homburger Erickson, Identity: Youth and Crisis. (New York: Norton, 1968).

different version of the past. When the participants distinguish this, they find themselves discovering, for the very first time, recurring themes in their lives; themes that have governed how they view the world and react to all that happens to them. Most are unaware of this pervasive influence of the past in their lives, and as such, live less than full lives, living futures that are not entirely distinguished from the past. In essence they do not experience the *va* between their past, present and their future. If they are aware of it, the *va* is not respected. While we cannot do anything about the facts of the past, and since the future, uninterrupted, is a more or less, better or different rendering of the past, therefore the only generative space for creating anew is the infinite present. In the present, each presentational immediate data item is received and immediately moves into the realm of causal efficacy having influenced the future. While it is not as neat as I have just described, distinguishing the different *va* allows one to separate and become part of the other at the same time. It allows the knower to be present to the now; this act creates space for critical thinking, creative knowledge and relationships to occur.

During this portion of the conversation, the participants are given a technique for putting the past where it belongs – in the past. We begin to design our lives as a generative, free and authentic expression from what is possible, rather than from what has been. Unencumbered by the past, we experience a greater level of vitality, well-being, fun and catharsis, and are able to enjoy a new-found sense of connection and intimacy with the people in our lives and ultimately with the cosmos. This ability to break from the past is what Maria Harris refers to as going beyond tradition to become a reality.⁵¹

⁵¹ Harris, Maria. Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church. (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989) 122. Harris under the Didache rubric of Christian Education advocates going beyond tradition and incorporate other religious traditions into ones repertoire of tools for

II. *Suiga ma Liliuga* – Change vs. Transformation

To effect change, we work on altering circumstances, the people around us, the environment, and even ourselves. We speak words to effect change, we threaten, we inflict pain, we cause an impact on the space that we occupy. This change essentially occurs as a comparison to something that previously existed. By its very nature, change is past-based. Without a basis for comparison, provided by the past, change cannot exist. Transformation, on the other hand, is an act of bringing forth, inventing, or creating something. Because it involves creation and because it calls for respecting *va*, it is inherently expansive and infinite. Jesus touched upon the differences during his dialogue with Nicodemus (John 3:1-15). When Jesus talked about being born again, Nicodemus thought he was referring to physicality, atomistic and “in comparison to the past” change. when in essence Jesus was referring to spirituality, eventful, and “ex-nihilo” creative transformation. Jesus was referring to something that exists in time that one cannot explain with one’s existing way of understanding reality forcing one to reinterpret life. Changes are temporal, easy to discern and affect; transformation is permanent, difficult to explain and spiritual.

In Religious Education as Social Transformation, Allan Moore argues that the transformation of society is the ultimate goal of religious education, and religious education should shape major societal goals, processes, and institutions.⁵² Then, transformation is encased and described in terms of changes that may or may not occur,

effecting teaching, but falls short of showing the teacher how to break from the tight and pervasive grip of the past.

⁵² Alan J. Moore, ed., Religious Education as Social Transformation (Birmingham AL: Religious Education Press, 1989).

and if they do occur, they may not be permanent. What we have learned from the research is that transformation is best achieved on a one-on-one basis.⁵³ When Jesus spoke of himself being the resurrection and the life, he was referring to a transformation that was a complete reconfiguring of the elements of his body from a pre-resurrection construct to a post-resurrection construct, permanent and present. In a similar vein, the Apostle Paul talks about how the body of Christ was transformed during the resurrection to a body which is not limited by time, space or substance and believers are heirs to such a transformed body (Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15; 1 Corinthians 15:44-51). Transformation in a nutshell, is not something that we can produce; however, we can prepare the soil for transformation to begin to take root. We do this by paying attention to the *va* between the participant and the learner and speaking possibility into that relationship. Similarly, Steve Kang refers to the pre-requisite for transformation as a realization that human beings “can indeed conscientiously realize their life’s full vision, despite the limiting situations and contradictions, through relationships with fellow human beings and the world.”⁵⁴ Having distinguished transformation apart from change, the participants are now able to think and act outside existing views and limitations, redefining themselves and the reality they know.

III. *Gagana: Laei o Mafaufauga* – Language: Clothing Thoughts and the World

⁵³ This insight came to the researcher after hours of sharing portions of the Tafesilafa’i curriculum with Samoan youth groups. The best interaction were during one on one sessions and they have made a difference in participants lives.

⁵⁴ Conde-Frazier, Kang and Parrett, Many Colored Kingdom, 96. See also Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 91-92.

Language is commonly thought of as a bridge to the world. The Samoan language is a bridge to the Samoan world. Without language our thoughts and the world would not be as we know it, and without the Samoan language the Samoan world would not be accessible. Even the way we learn language implies that first there is a world. Then, in order to connect and deal with that world, we use language. We seldom consider that language may in fact be what brings that world into being. Part of the Christian narrative talks about how in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The Word was with God in the beginning.⁵⁵ The Samoan cosmogony also mentions a God that urges things into existence. However, language has not had a recent transformative effect on reality; perhaps the pendulum is swinging the other way, and we again stand in need of the logos.

In this part of the conversation, we explore a new view of language that alters the very nature of what is possible. Language now is seen as a creative act, and as such the words that we use create a *va* between what we say and the receiving world. On the other hand, listening begins to be discerned as an act of worship in relation to the speaking; actions that one would normally view as commonplace, take on new dimension and unexpected power. Now the words we speak and the listening we do, become instruments of creation; and keeping our word now takes on cosmological proportions. bell hooks further distinguishes language as both an instrument for creating life or as a “weapon that can shame, humiliate and colonize.”⁵⁶ In the Samoan worldview, whatever

⁵⁵ John 1, 1-5. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness but the darkness has not understood it.

use of language there may be, language must be used with the utmost care and respect, because it can be a site for resistance or it can serve as a familiarity blanket that reduces estrangement.⁵⁷ Language is distinguished as important when entering into relationships called truth,⁵⁸ where our feelings may be more vital than our minds, since our minds strive to analyze and divide, while our feelings reach for relatedness.⁵⁹

IV. *O Lau Filifiliga* – Freewill: The Nature of Choice

The power to choose is uniquely human. We all have a self interest in shaping the course of our lives – making the right choices and pursuing what is important to us. In the Samoan cosmogony there was never a question about a restriction in choices. The person's relationship with the divine necessitates the maintenance of this *va*, in the necessary act of worship. There was consultation, deliberation, and negotiation in the *va* between the beings, but the choices were such that they were solitary acts of creation. One commonly held view regards choice as merely reacting to, or selecting among, the existing options. During this section of the conversation, we explore choice as a profoundly human ability to create. When choice is understood and known in this way, what had previously seemed simply part of “the way things are” – inevitable or impervious to change – appears in a new light. When participants distinguish for

⁵⁶ bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (Routledge, New York 1994) p. 168

⁵⁷ Ibid., p171-72

⁵⁸ Palmer, *To Know As We Are Known*, 85.

⁵⁹ The Samoan community in the diaspora, from the research, is now using both Samoan and English simultaneously to communicate and to receive communication. The implications of this reality and the characteristics of the world that this “new” language bridges and creates is outside the scope of this work, and is left for future researchers.

themselves that a choice can be a creative act and not just a selection they are subject to. certain restraints seemed to come off their *mauli*, or inner self, as if a burden was lifted. For the first time they find themselves able to choose – to have a say – about whom they are and who they will be, as the author of their lives in any and all situations. When we are clearly able to choose, to create, to promulgate, to differentiate, then this becomes the basis for a healthy self esteem, both individually and communally. bell hooks refers to the problem of self esteem as: “a sense of inadequacy, or not being ‘enough,’ a feeling of guilt or shame or inferiority, a clear lack of self-acceptance, self-trust, and self love.”⁶⁰ In the Samoan worldview, a healthy self esteem is ascribed to deities, to others and, through the maintenance of proper *va*, to the self as well. Samoans have self esteem problems when they are disconnected from each other, or when the maintenance of the *va* is no longer a priority. Long before ‘self-esteem’ was part of the vernacular, black pride was something that W.E.B. Du Bois advocated. In “Credo” in 1904 W.E.B. Du Bois wrote:

“I believe in pride of race and lineage and self....I believe in Liberty for all men, the space to stretch their arms and their souls, the right to breathe and the right to vote, the freedom to choose their friends, enjoy the sunshine and ride on the railroads, uncursed by color; thinking, dreaming, working as they will in a kingdom of God and Love.”⁶¹

To choose “uncursed” by anything is the distinction that this portion of the conversation is attempting to create. And to choose as an act of creation is the *va* that needed differentiation. When the issue of self esteem was mapped onto the Samoan American

⁶⁰ bell hooks, Rock My Soul: Black People and Self Esteem (New York: Atria Books, 2003), 1-2.

⁶¹ Ibid., 3.

experience and context, freewill was seen as the cause of a diminished self-esteem.⁶²

When there were too many choices the Samoan tended to wallow in low self esteem. It was having to choose for reasons other than the sheer joy of choosing that began to eat away at the Samoan self-esteem, until the family structure was impacted to such a degree that a fresh distinction of the nature of choice was necessary. One reason for this, in my opinion, is because Samoans lead communal lives and most of their decisions are done communally; to burden a single individual with so many choices would naturally have an impact on their self esteem.⁶³

V. *Saili Malo* - Access to Being Extraordinary

Each of us would like to be extraordinary, to have our lives matter, to excel in the areas that are important to us – our families, our work, our intimate relationships, our financial futures; as heir to the throne and kin to the divine, the good life is a birthright. Every day we are presented with the opportunity either to live a business-as-usual life or to create something beyond who we've been and what we know.

In this part of the conversation, we come to grips with what allows for real power, integrity, and courage in all the areas that are important to us. We explore the opportunity we have to express ourselves individually and fully, to set aside current standards, to

⁶² Participatory Action Research done with twelve Samoan families in the Long Beach, South Bay area in 2002-2003 revealed that most of the adults are confused into inactivity when presented with too many options.

⁶³ Self esteem is closely aligned with the Samoan concept of *matamuli* which is not so much a judgment that you pass on yourself, but an experience of your person in relations to the world, other and the universe. *Matamuli* entails moving towards life rather than away from it; to move towards consciousness rather than unconsciousness; to approach facts with respect rather than denial; to operate self-responsibly rather than irresponsibly. In essence, self esteem is when the ultimate *va* is properly maintained and respected.

question firmly held assumptions, to be at ease no matter what the circumstance, and to break and reinvent the mold. While much of the scholarship, literature, and research operate from the basis of “something is wrong,” it is the intent of Tafesilafa’i to fully express itself from an alternative possibility that “something is right,” as such it is very important that the settings must be communal and conducive to critical thinking. Critical thinking here is associated with the long standing Samoan tradition of *fa’amoe le toa*.⁶⁴

FOURTH SITTING

I. *Ia Toe Afua le Taeao* - New Possibilities, Breakthrough Results, and Review

In this last three-hour session, leaders from each youth community are invited to gather and reflect theologically with a guest speaker on the events of the year, inviting youth leaders to new possibilities they’ve created for themselves. Key discussions and critical insights are revisited, deepening our understanding of the distinctions of Tafesilafa’i and their relevance in the lives of Samoans in Diaspora. Our guest gets an experience of what Tafesilafa’i is and its mission and work in the Samoan community. Each participant is given a unique opportunity to see how this works by directly participating in a portion of the *faa-Samoa*, or the Samoan worldview and technology.

One of the outcomes of this session was the creation of a product call *suatalisua*.⁶⁵ The place of the *suatalisua* in the *sua* presentation is given in the Samoan

⁶⁴ *Fa’amoe le Toa*: literally means to put the rooster (*toa*) to sleep, or let the warrior (*toa*) sleep. It is the process of discernment; it looks like avoiding a decision or procrastinating a difficult decision, but it is the allowance of time to pass so the proper *va* is discerned and the relationships properly discerned and respected. From this process comes the *Tofa ma le Faautaga* or Samoa wisdom.

⁶⁵ During the *sua* presentation, the components are (1) Suiga – O le vailolo ua sei i le tala ma le ie papalagi (2) Laulau – O le faavevela ma le ta’apaepae (3) Suatalisua – Manu fata, taai fa, pusa pisupo, povi, ta’iola (4) Ie Toga – Ie o le Malo (5) Tofa – Ie tele o le Malo (6) Teutusi – Usually a gift of cash (7) Faaoso – Paelo, pusa apa, pusa wahoo. The *suatalisua* distinguished during Tafesilafa’i is a box that contained 60

community, in the past the content of the *suatalisua* was something other than a creation from our own community. Armed with the tools of transformation, certain motifs were discerned and when applied to the diasporic community, products such as the *suatalisua* came into being.

II. *E Poto le Tautai ae Se Lana Atu i Ama* - Dealing Powerfully with Breakdowns

Here, we explore a technology for handling breakdowns effectively. When things do not go as planned or intended, we have a breakdown. When something that we say shouldn't be or something that stops us from achieving what we want to achieve shows up, it is a breakdown. Instead of seeing breakdowns as setbacks, less than, loss, and other familiar ways that we understand breakdowns, we begin to view breakdowns as a pathway or *ala* – an actual access – to fulfilling what's possible. So a breakdown is an opportunity to access communal repertoires of resources. It is an opportunity to distinguish again the *va* between what is so and what it can be.

Having left familiar grounds to immigrate to the States, immigrants are susceptible to breakdowns. Everything from the climate, to the culture, to the currency, to the language, is an experience in breakdowns and can lead to a diminished sense of self-worth. However, when we see these events as learning opportunities, when we expect them, then we will live through breakdowns with great power and intent. As a result, we are left with the confidence to step beyond our comfort zone, if only because we know others are depending on us and rooting for us, and to welcome breakdowns as an occasion for education, leadership, and accomplishment.

cans of Wahoo fish packed in oil at a packing plant in American Samoa, with the label *suatalisua* on it so the youth in diaspora can identify it easily.

III. *E Tu Manu ae le Tu Logologo* - Transformation as a Way of Living

One of the notions of the Tafesilafa'i conversation is that of possibility moving from an abstract ideal to a day-to-day living reality, informing the abstract. It is the *va* between these two polarities, abstract and daily life, that makes for transformation to exist as a way of living. To fully grasp the possibilities of Tafesilafa'i is to be present to the conversation on a daily basis, asking questions and engaging daily living, constantly being in the space and clearance that calls for transformation. When life occurs in this new framed way, the way we approach the world, and the way the world approaches us, changes.

Martin Luther King Jr. often struggled between the conservative bourgeois supporters and the black churches, and he often meditated on Romans 12:2 which reminded him of the necessity of dissent, challenge, and change: "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewal of your minds." All of us in leadership positions and in the culture as a whole are called to a renewal of our minds if we are to transform culture and society. Tafesilafa'i is one place where the minds of the leaders of the Samoan community are challenged to be renewed so the way we live and work each day can reflect our joy in cultural diversity, our passion for justice and our love for freedom.

Tafesilafa'i leaves us with an access to relate to life with new *ola* or energy, new freedom, and new power. The abilities learned never leave you, and are yours forever; and when connected to the community, we will be reminded of our abilities and our connection to the divine. The dances that we learn, the relationships that we become part

of, become a part of us. The Tafesilafa'i conversation is not a one-time event. It is a moment-by-moment, on going approach to being alive.

Summary

This chapter highlighted insights gained from the research, reflecting on possible implications on certain constructs such as theological, social and economical. The last portion of this chapter outlined the Tafesilafa'i curriculum, which is an attempt at taking data from the research and putting it into practice such that transformation occurs in the community. The curriculum is refined, tested, and reconstituted in community while being implemented.

CHAPTER 7

Findings and Next Steps

The heart of this dissertation is the basic question: How do Samoans come to know? The dissertation started with the researcher's personal journey and it is appropriate that it ends on a personal note as well. The research methodology used grounded my being to the community that I did research. In meeting families, doing interviews, fielding questions and participating in their lives proved very transformational for me; it transformed me as a person, a leader and a scholar. In the process of gathering data to begin addressing the research question, I myself was transformed. The knowledge gleaned from the data analysis was put into practice and a conversation now exists to further this inquiry into how Samoans come to know. The work that Tafesilafa'i does will allow us to better understand the Samoans in the diaspora such that we can design and construct infrastructures to enhance and move the education of Samoans forward. In a nutshell this dissertation has been about:

- Distinguishing how Samoans come to know – one of our theories grounded in the data is that they come to know in community.
- Distinguishing epistemological mechanisms – these keep the Samoans together and directly impact how they come to know. Now that these infrastructures are distinguished, the reader, can be better equipped for future work in the Samoan community.

- Determining how we can utilize the knowledge to address the challenge mentioned in the problem statement. Both the will to address and the way to address challenges are important.
- Exploring the transformation of theological constructs – as long as the conversation continues and conversation partners continue to be committed to the task of theological transformation, we can still count on new insights from this conversation.
- Discussing interactions for community building and organizing – at the end of the day, a conversation is only as effective to the extent that community is build up and organized for affecting changes in the community. The common good is the goal and I believe that Samoans can contribute well to this goal.
- Looking at the socio-economic infrastructure – transforming existing economic structures such that cultural values are incorporated in addition to dominant, for profit motives.

Distinguishing all these has gifted this community with a *malae*, a field where conversations about things Samoan can occur in the diaspora. This *malae* is called Tafesilafa'i. Its goal is to provide the knower with tools for transformation: changes that are natural, life long, cathartic, and generative, quite similar to metamorphosis in insects. Participating in a transformational process naturally empowers one to engage others and the context with the purpose of transforming it, such that the quality of life improves for all communities.

Limitations of the Research

The two noteworthy limitations of this research are: universalization and longitudinal effects. The universalization of these research findings are limited because they were generated in a cultural-specific qualitative inquiry. The research design, as mentioned previously, was not intended to produce results that account for or predict the behavior of Samoans throughout the world. However, because the inquiry generated a relatively clear and specific grounded theory that applied to practical experiences of Samoans in the diaspora, it should be relatively easy to design a series of focused hypothesis-testing studies to experimentally verify and expand the theory generated, on how Samoans come to know.

Second, time and budget limitations made it impractical to assess how narrative-based processing might have influenced participants' long-term thinking over multiple months or years. Some relevant literature suggests that many of the insights that come from experiential interventions such as this one may not show up until long after the intervention ends.¹ Thus, it is possible that participants may have experienced more meaningful effects of the narrative-based processing realizations months after the encounter ended, than on the day the data was actually collected. Collecting those longitudinal data was beyond the scope of the current study. Future studies might consider narrative-based experiential learning interventions which are followed up with longitudinal check-ups for months or longer to explore if and how long-term after-effects actually occur.

Next Steps

¹ Leslie S. Greenberg, Laura N. Rise and Robert Elliot. Facilitating Emotional Change: The Moment-by-Moment Process, (New York: Guilford, 1993). See also Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention (New York: Harper Collins, 1996)

My intention is to take back to the community what the research has shown of how Samoans come to know and how the cultural narratives play an important part in forming a Samoan epistemology in the diaspora.

Research Insights

Our research has found that Samoans come to know in community. They come to know in other ways as well, but the knowledge that they gain in community is uniquely Samoan, and its efficacy constitutes a Samoan epistemology. To build and organize such a community the organizer must be a ware of the various ways the Samoan community is organized. Knowing the structures, will allow one the opportunity to respect the existing *va* leading to a successful and effective campaign for change.

Samoans are not spending time in touch with the spiritual. From their cosmogony we can surmise that the deepest source of cultural energy, indeed the deepest source of all human creativity, flows from divine creativity. Samoans in the diaspora have shunned, though not intentionally, their natural connection to this source, the art of discerning the holy and pondering the *va*. Because of that, Samoans are in danger of becoming schizophrenic, running after the values of a dominant community and, in the process, dislocating themselves from their God-given community. As Samoans were constructed as spiritual beings, this will eventually take its toll on the collective psyche, the communal unconscious of the Samoan community. Several instances in the field have pointed to a disconnect in the being of persons, a disturbance in the communal spirit. I also sensed a genuine desire to reconnect to community. But alas, the physical world has

convinced many that the world we live in and see is more important than the unseen non-sensory and spiritual world.

From education to theology, to eco-psychology, to multiple intelligences, to cultural psychology, to the worlds of education, psychology and science, reality itself seems to be undergoing a great shift towards the notions, ideas, and knowledge of basic and primary communities. It is clear that the contempt that the enlightenment thinkers had for what they perceived as “primitive knowledge” is obvious in the literature produced during that era and manifested in the imperial colonization of other groups. The effects of these conquests are still being felt today and perpetuated in the diasporic communities unknowingly. Now that the pendulum is beginning to swing the other way, the next model for community building and organizing is through the social and spiritual creativity of grounded communities networked in solidarity. As the Samoan community and other similar communities grow, they will serve as oasis in a society so marked by rootlessness, fragmentation and spiritual sterility. My prayer is that the Samoan community will become a force in sharing their indigenous Christian values so the mistakes of yesteryears are not repeated in the world.

APPENDIX

Interviews by the Author

Chief Aiono Dr. Fanaafi Le Tagaloa	Long Beach, California 2003
Chief Faumuina Vineta Noa	Long Beach, California 2003
Chief Muliagatele Mona Porotesano	Carson, California 2003
HC Pule Tuiasosopo	Long Beach, California 2004
Sven Ortquist	Long Beach, California 2004
Chief Su'efuaina Setu Suasua	Long Beach, California 2005
PC Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese	Pago Pago, American Samoa 2005
HC Gafatasi Lemusu	Bellflower, California 2006
Rev. Oianata'i Tuivanu Matale	Long Beach, California 2006
Chief Pa'u Pepe Faleatua	Long Beach, California 2006
Chief Teleiai Christian Ausage	Long Beach, California 2006
Toeaso Faatili	Long Beach, California 2006

Community Events

Tafesilafa'i Festivals (1997-2007)	Long Beach, California
Bestowing the Gaoteote Title (2002)	Vatia, American Samoa
Women's Fellowship Luau (2004)	Carson, California
Samoa Language Conference (2005)	Mapusaga, American Samoa
Mortgage Burning – Tapasa o le Ola (2006)	Wilmington, California

Religious Events

Sunday Worship Service (2000-2006)

Second Samoan UCC

Long Beach, California

Children's Sunday Service (2001-2006)

Second Samoan UCC

Long Beach, California

Mother's Day Service (2001-2006)

Second Samoan UCC

Long Beach, California

Pulpit Exchange (2005)

United Samoan Church

Carson, California

Sanctuary dedication (2005)

Faitoto'a Matala Pea

Tafuna, American Samoa

Family Events

Funeral in Riverside (2006)

Fatu "John" Kuresa

Dedication of a Room Addition (2006)

Jennings Residence

Birth of a New Baby (2006)

Tone and Ula Fata

Graduation from College Celebration (2006)

Toeaso Faatili

Celebration of Securing Immigrant Status (2007)

Ie and Feiloaiga Nu'u

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